

THE ROOT AND FLOWER OF PRAYER



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THE ROOT AND FLOWER OF PRAYER

By

Roger Hazelton
DEAN OF THE CHAPEL
COLORADO COLLEGE

NEW YORK
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
1943

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First Printing.

Theology Library
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To
MY MOTHER

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Acknowledgments

MANY good friends have helped in the making of this book. I am indebted to Albert W. Palmer and Charles W. Gilkey for illustrating in my student days the artistry and integrity in public prayer for which the book pleads. For the same benefits, and more especially for suggestive and searching counsel in preparing the manuscript, I am grateful to Arthur Cushman McGiffert, Jr.

I wish also to thank Professor and Mrs. Lewis M. Knapp and the Rev. and Mrs. Edward F. Manthei for careful reading and helpful comment as well as Miss Frances Clugston for typing the manuscript. Talks with the Rev. Raymond A. Waser and Rabbi Abraham L. Feinberg, as well as with other ministers, and with students and colleagues at Colorado College, have been of great value in getting the book into shape. To my wife I owe so much for patient and encouraging help that it is difficult to put my gratitude into words at all.

Finally, I wish to thank the publishers who have permitted the use of copyright material in the book.

ROGER HAZELTON

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THE ROOT AND FLOWER OF PRAYER

CHAPTER ONE

The Badness of Our Prayers

A STORY is told by Willard L. Sperry about an Australian clergyman who traveled in leisurely fashion across the United States, turning in at churches of various persuasions from Sunday to Sunday. When he reached the end of his trip a friend asked him what most impressed him about American worship services. He answered, quickly and to the point, "The badness of your prayers."

There is a truth in that indictment which ought to make those of us who lead in public prayer thoroughly uncomfortable. It is also the sort of judgment which urges forward a book like this. Praying in public is an art that has fallen, by and large, on evil days. Since any effort to become more effective in this art must begin with a confession of failure, in what does the badness of our prayers consist?

One strong impression, which does not down in spite of the many alibis offered, is that of an inexcusable carelessness. To be sure, ministers are uncommonly busy men. After a hectic week of ringing doorbells, meeting committees, and making speeches, with work on the sermon sandwiched in between the dis-

tracting claims and duties of his vocation, it is the line of least resistance to come to the highest point of worship armed with a manual of ready-made prayers, or, what is worse, trusting to the inspiration of the moment and a convenient memory.

We may defend our carelessness with another excuse, that of necessary concentration upon the sermon. The glorification of the sermon which is so characteristic of Protestantism leads to an expectation on the part of the people and to a sense of duty on the minister's part which may indeed produce better sermons but only spells disaster for the pastoral prayer. So the minister relegates his pastoral office to week-day contacts, becoming almost exclusively priest and prophet in the Sunday service and forgetting the necessary pastoral side of both preaching and worship. He loses thereby a great opportunity for pastoral effectiveness in his public prayers.

Sometimes we offer a more ingenuous plea. Especially in those churches where the tradition of extemporaneous prayer is strong, both leader and people are apt to suppose that unprepared prayers are more sincere and from the heart than prepared ones can possibly be. Let us admit that there is often a heart-warming quality about them; they are flavored with the resonant piety, the salty wit or the uplifted spirit of the one who prays. Henry Ward Beecher offered in Plymouth pulpit extemporaneous prayers whose sincerity was as telling in their own day as their length would be disastrous in our own.

But prayers of this sort may also be unmeaning and

uninspiring. All too frequently they are wordy ramblings, patchworks of disorganized appeals, dashes of sentimentality, hurried lists of needs and blessings, or a succession of amiable compliments to God. Careful preparation at least insures that the leader has something to say and prevents the chaos and confusion of words which mar the spirit and destroy the intention of prayer. The "sentence prayers" of a young people's group, which ought to be as genuine expressions of need and exaltation as our Protestant worship can afford, are commonly of this kind. The prayers offered at large public gatherings are often unforgivably careless. They make one feel the truth of a Negro parson's comment to his high-flying, non-stop brother: "Take some feathers out of the wings of your imagination and stick 'em in the tail of your judgment!"

Carelessness in delivery is quite as fatal to the spirit and purpose of public prayer as lack of adequate preparation. The ministerial monotone which is insensitive to the prayer's changes of mood or tempo is not less disastrous than the easy conversational informality which misses its intimate stirrings and ultimate overtones.

The point is that public prayer is always better for the discipline of preparation, whether or not it is carried into the pulpit or placed on the lectern to be read. This holds good for seasoned veterans as well as for their younger brethren. The spectacle of a leader of worship floundering verbally about in a vain effort to make his prayer arrive somewhere and say

something may be amusing or pitiful. It is never worshipful. Whether on grounds of busyness, absorption with the sermon, or spontaneous piety, then, carelessness in public prayer is indefensible.

Another widespread fault is conventionality. Though we prepare our prayers ever so carefully they may still lack the vivid, pointed expression of men's needs and hopes which belong to a genuine experience of worship. The peril of conventionality in prayer is twofold. Words which are merely conventional may represent a language with which many worshipers may not feel at home. Their pious, traditional meanings are unfamiliar and meet either an uncomprehending or a rebellious response.

The other peril is that such words are too familiar. Instead of probing deeply into the hearts of those gathered together, stretching their imaginations, expanding their sympathies, and lifting them into the very presence of God, they trim down, to a respectable, customary level, the surging wants and dreams of men and women. They are precisely what Jesus meant by vain repetition. They have an "elaborate futility." Though they soothe and lull us, they do not help us to grow in Christian stature. Hearing them, like the rich in the Gospel, we are sent empty away.

This fault reveals itself in our constant preference for abstract nouns. Words like hope, love, sin, and peace mean very little when standing alone. They must be filled in with suggestive, imaginative content or they remain bloodless, vague, and unmoving. The

words of prayer must, of course, be large, expansive ones; but they must be warm as well, glowing with the colors and tones of definite, contemporary human living.

A third reason for the badness of our prayers lies in a certain regimenting impulse which has become very evident of late in the planning of worship services. Why must American Protestants forever be "saving democracy," "building a new world," or considering "the gospel for a pagan time"? This technique of setting up in advance a slogan or theme has undoubtedly value in planning programs and even in clarifying objectives. When it is carried into the service of worship, however, it too often acts as a regimenting force, imposing on the group a mood of dutiful dullness as its members go listlessly through the prearranged routine laid down by a "worship committee."

There will doubtless be occasions during the church year when a unified experience or a common concern demands an answering unity in the themes of worship and prayer. But this is not regimentation. Such experiences as those of Thanksgiving or a conference on peace naturally seek expression in prayer.

When, however, as is sometimes the case, a service is constructed on the basis of a catchy phrase, so that every item in it shall underscore the central thought, the springs of worship are dammed at their source. It is easier to develop a service of worship and prayer in this way than it is to do the really creative thing of brooding over the actual places where people live.

But this is not the way in which prayer and worship gain reality and value.

A fourth indictment of our public praying is that it is frequently nothing more than preaching in disguise. Prayer of this sort may seem to praise but seeks only to edify. Though it speaks the name of God, it is directed not to Him but to the congregation.

Such a use of prayer is mischievous in the extreme. It completely obscures the minister's proper rôle at that moment, hopelessly confusing his prophetic with his priestly and pastoral task. The pastoral prayer is his opportunity to be a good shepherd to his people, helping them to discover themselves and speaking for them to God, rather than to them for God. If the minister fails here, he has missed one of his greatest chances for Christian service.

There also seems to be a certain moral impatience in this widespread misuse of the pastoral prayer. This is based on the common illusion that by talking about a problem to people something has been done about it. Even holding up an ideal to people is not enough to bring them into line with it. As William Ernest Hocking has reminded us, it takes more than a look at the Good Samaritan for us to be like him. Our faith at its best has known the painful lack of connection between knowing what is good and doing it. Prayer should be an incentive, it cannot be a substitute, for action.

But the strangest and most incredible thing about the prayer which is a disguised sermon is that it misses the whole direction of the prayer-experience,

which is toward God. It is an inversion of the proper mood and spirit of prayer and betrays a sad ignorance of the requirements of worship.

A final fault must be confessed before we turn to more constructive matters. This is insincerity in prayer. It is not so much a conscious hypocrisy as simply the absence of intellectual integrity and verbal clarity that brings this about. How many of us pray with ideas of God and man which neither we nor our people understand? How many of us think in one theology and pray in another? How many of us pray with words which have either lost or never gained vital and personal meaning? This fault may underlie all the others. Carelessness, conventionality, regimentation, disguised sermonizing are often masks hiding a poverty of thought and a coldness of heart.

The seriousness of this condition can scarcely be overstressed. It is at the moment of prayer that the minister most clearly reveals himself. Then his scholarship and skill take second place. His religious sincerity—or his lack of it—tells the whole story. What he thinks and says are but the image of what he is. Here he is not teacher, not even prophet, but worshiper among his fellow-worshipers. No elegance of phrase, sonority of diction, or intricacy of thought can cloud that one clear moment of self-revelation.

We, to whom this five-fold indictment of the badness of our prayers strikes home, must be genuinely and deeply concerned with bettering our attitudes, habits, and skills. There are important and imperative reasons why this should be so.

A first reason is that the pastoral prayer in our Protestant tradition is the climax of worship. Hymns, readings, and responses are all parts of worship which mark transitions, leading up to or away from its highest moment. The sermon may be worshipful, and should be, but it is no substitute for the pastoral prayer. A sermon is directed to the listening congregation, not to the highest God in whose presence the people are met.

The pastoral prayer, unlike these other elements in the experience of worship, has for Protestants a unique, climactic place. If it might be compared with one moment in the Mass, that moment would be the lifting up of the Host. It lifts up, consciously yet humbly, the fragmentary imperfections of men and women into the light of the total perfection of God. To it belong the same hushed expectancy, the same impelling urgency, the same wonder and mystery, which the sanctus-bell calls forth in the hearts of Catholic worshipers. To awaken and sustain that sense is the high office of the leader of prayer.

A second reason for facing the task of pastoral prayer with serious and sensitive concern lies in the renaissance of interest in the outward forms of worship which marks our time. Our churches have been enriched by a long-absent beauty and dignity. The day of barren meeting-houses and fan-shaped theater-like "auditoriums" is past; so is the day of haphazard and unceremonious orders of worship. Yet the practice of public prayer lags behind our achievements in remodeling churches and planning services. We must

provide a deeper and richer spirit of worship commensurate with the newly-found loveliness and stateliness of its externals. What shall it profit us if we gain chancel and altar, vestment, and pageantry, but cannot recover the "inner immensity" which they but serve to symbolize?

The pastoral prayer is often the one jarring note in an otherwise dignified and worshipful service. Our task must be to provide, in the preparation and delivery of our prayers, the inner spirit within our churches which their outward aspect more and more suggests.

A third reason for earnest inquiry into the practice of public prayer arises from the growing consciousness among the various denominations that there exists, in the words of the Oxford Conference of 1937, "a unity deeper than our divisions." The sense that all Christians form one household of faith is slowly but surely molding the thinking of their leaders. So far the efforts after a healing of the divisions within the body of Christ have been in the form of intellectual agreement and organized co-operation.

If the urgent prayer that we may all be one is to be granted, however, discussion and organization will not be enough. We must learn to worship together as well as think and work together. We must share our Christian experience as freely and willingly as we share our ideals and merge our projects.

Where better than in the pastoral prayer may the local church reach sympathetically out toward the larger fellowship? We may preach about it, sing

about it, read about it; but perchance in prayer we may give ourselves to it and be caught up in it. Here we may lift up our longing after oneness in Christ, and here the mystical binding forces of that power of love which overleaps all man-made barriers and lightens the world's darkness may be made inescapably real to us. Let our prayers, then, be winged messengers of the coming unity and hold it before men with patient persuasiveness.

These are some of the motives in our time for thorough and honest self-appraisal by leaders of worship. They also provide the incentive for a book like this, which seeks to be not just another book on conducting public worship but to fill a real and as yet unoccupied place in a rapidly growing field of interest.

If, admitting the truth about our situation and recognizing the importance of our task, we turn to the many helpful guides in the practice of worship which have recently appeared, we are still without fundamental direction. We find valuable suggestions about framing and delivering prayers, but a general view of what prayer is, how it functions and what it may become in the religious life is largely absent. If we look into the theoretical treatments of prayer and worship, like those by Heiler, Puglisi, or Meland, we gain illuminating insights but miss the practical wisdom we need.

What is essential is that theory and technique in prayer should be focused at the actual point of the experience of worship and leading in worship. Only if we set about our task with a clear understanding

of worship combined with a careful skill in its performance can we satisfactorily meet the requirements of our time and our vocation. This book is written in the hope that it may relate theory and technique in worship so as to quicken and enrich its effectiveness.

The badness of our prayers cannot be removed by learning a set of techniques alone. By themselves, these tend to make us self-conscious beautifiers of prayer, not its spirited and devoted agents. Nor can it be overcome by theory alone, if that theory lacks the environment of piety in which prayer lives and moves and has its being. Yet if we consider our failures in the light of our responsibilities, bringing theory and technique to bear on the sincerity and truth which alone saves us from becoming mere technicians or theorists, we shall come a long way toward recovering prayer as the center of public worship. That is a consummation devoutly to be wished.

In order to face our problem concretely and pointedly we shall consider what is usually called, in Protestant services, the pastoral prayer. Not only is it in common use but it employs the whole range of moods appropriate to prayer. Furthermore, it is public, occupying a place of prominence in the corporate worship with which we are familiar.

To study the pastoral prayer with the aims we have in mind we shall look first at the experience of prayer, especially at the needs in which it arises and the ends it seeks. Then we shall turn to the thought of God, the worshipful Reality assumed and addressed in prayer. Following this we are to think more specifi-

cally of prayer as a form of words, emphasizing its kinship with poetry. Then we shall deal with the available source-materials for constructing prayers, from liturgical and devotional material to the rich literature of the imagination. Suggestions for preparation and delivery will next occupy our attention, including some comments on the function of the pastoral prayer in a time of war. The study is concluded with some of the author's prayers, chosen to illustrate the principles which the book sets forth.

Long ago a Hebrew psalmist, baffled, weak, afraid like ourselves, but with the steadfast loyalty of the man of faith, sang his pilgrim song: "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills." It is ever the purpose of prayer to lift men's eyes from the dreary plain of what is common and mean, from the clinging under-brush of perplexity and fear, unto the hills of faith whence our help comes. May we who lead our fellow-men in prayer not lose sight of its high intention, that our people, too, may learn and keep the practice of the upward look.

CHAPTER TWO

Standing in the Need of Prayer

PRAYER, on the face of it, is one of the strangest things which human beings do. It is a pattern of behavior spread all across the scene of history—wonderfully varied yet dominated by a few persistent motifs. The American Indian, sprinkling corn meal in front of his adobe dwelling, the Chinese coolie, bowing before the shrine of his ancestors, the Tibetan monk, working with his prayer wheel, or the European peasant, fingering his rosary, expresses each in his own way the undying persuasion of the race that we are not alone in the world but depend for our good upon a Power outside and beyond us.

Only human beings could live so boldly and wonderfully in its presence:

Strange that we creatures of the petty ways
Should sometimes think us thoughts with God ablaze,
Touching the fringes of the outer stars.

Simple or sophisticated, primitive or civilized, folk of countless times and places have lived and died in that persuasion.

What does this curious business mean? What sort of experience is prayer, and how does it function in

the life of man upon the earth? What are the needs in which it arises and the aims it seeks? These questions the present chapter and the next will attempt to answer. Let them not be thought theoretical or impractical. If we are in earnest about bettering our practice of public prayer, they become at once necessary. How can we proceed confidently to the making of prayers unless we possess a clear and definite understanding of the sort of experience which prayer is?

Prayer is religious experience in its acutest form. But what does constitute religion as an experience? We often say that religion is the whole of life. If we mean that it cannot be regarded as a mere segment or fraction of life, that is true. If we mean, however, that there is nothing distinctive or unique in religion as contrasted with other kinds of living, the statement is plainly false. Man's religious activity is surely not identical with his economic, artistic, or political behavior.

One distinctive feature of religious living is a wholeness of personal response to the wholeness of things. I am involved in it, not as father, citizen, or worker alone, but as a man. The environment of such living is not merely my family, community, or country; it is the universe. Religion, then, is an interplay between the whole man and the whole world.

To think clearly about the matter we must state the quality of the experience as well as the extent of its operations. Waiving many interesting possibilities of debate in the already overcrowded field of definitions, let us come directly to the point and say that

religion is the intimate experience of an ultimate good. Its intimacy lies in the directness, depth, and urgency of feeling involved in a man's contact with his Most High; its ultimacy consists in the universal, supreme, and final character of that Good in which a man finds his own worth and meaning.

Prayer, as we have said, is a particularly acute form of this experience. Man at prayer is man seeking his Good. Praying is his spirit's thrust upward and outward into the immensity of things. As such, it is, or seems to be, for all we know of human and animal life, unique with man. There is something about a man that makes him most himself, and if he forgets or ignores it he is not a man at all. A push toward possibility, a thrusting toward the good, marks him among the creatures for what he is. Whatever other and less worthy things are in the grain of his nature, this much we know to be true.

Our praying may be trivial or profound, childish or mature. We may pray for success in business, love, or warfare; we may ask protection against fire, drought, disease, or death; we may carry to God such wants as a new toy or fatter dividends. Our prayers kindle a fire on the hearth of desire whose smoke is heavy with the impurities of selfishness. In them our wants call themselves imperiously to God's attention.

But there come times to all of us when the sense of good is numbed by crisis or despair, when its search is beaten back by disappointment, terror, or pain. Then the shell of our self-sufficiency falls off,

we are broken open by circumstances, and we become aware not so much of wants as of needs. At such times we stand most clearly in the need of prayer, and prayer itself becomes an experience of our need.

Prayer, in this maturer, profounder sense, brings a man to himself. When need is greatest he does not seek to change God but asks God to change him. He prays not for others to be kinder or circumstances more favorable. He prays rather for strength within himself, for control over himself, for right adjustment of himself to others and to God. His prayer is no longer petulant, bargaining, or demanding; it has become humble, self-critical, expectant. In the shocks and changes of life are seeds of maturity and profundity of spirit. When prayer is based on the recognition of need, it is fully religious, deeply Christian, in tone.

That we are thus brought to ourselves in prayer is a test of its competence. Superficial wants are broken through; the worshiper stands convinced of his fundamental needs. The perspective of prayer affords him a new and revealing vantage point upon the issues and conditions of his living. This yields us a first principle for attaining effectiveness in our prayers: the principle of self-discovery.

This principle is closely bound up with the whole Christian interpretation of human nature. In our day this view is sharply distinguished from an estimate of that nature as blindly instinctive or unconsciously mechanistic. For Christianity, man the worshiper is man the sinner. But what sort of being is it

who can thus miss the mark of his high calling and stand in the need of prayer? He is self-conscious as he is a problem to himself. He is purposive as he measures the present in the light of a possible future. He is responsible as he regards both failure and success as in fact his own and considers himself accountable for their consequences.

Man, as Christianity conceives him, is rooted in existence. His life is conditioned by the spatial and temporal changes common to all existent things, by the web of causal relationships among what he calls his facts, and by these facts themselves in all their obdurate givenness. Yet he also lives by the choices he makes, the things he likes or dislikes, the way he feels about what happens to him. Not only the immediacy of the present is his, but the memory of a long past and the anticipation of an unfolding future. He is, and knows himself to be, a child of earth; but he finds unmistakable hints in his experience that he is a child of starry heaven too.

As George Herbert put it, man is "one world and hath another to attend him." Though he goes on learning and unlearning, building and wrecking, stumbling and striving, loving and hating, when he is most himself he knows that the very condition of his growth as man is a patient, teachable openness toward what is not himself, toward what he does not make but finds. For him the ancient paradox of religion is no paradox at all but the simplest truth: "He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." Only if man be such a creature as this can he stand in the

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need of prayer; and only if some such account of his life be true does his religion—and his prayer—possess valid insight and driving power.

The evidence for the truth of this Christian assertion about man will not be found in laboratory experiments, the charting of brain-waves, or the findings regarding the effects upon personality of glandular secretions. It is not the scientist's findings but the scientist himself that bears it out. Does the scientist, or does he not, hold himself responsible for the discovery and communication of truth? Does he, or does he not, choose plans of action in accordance with imagined possibilities and work his way toward them? Is he, or is he not, aware of himself as a being different from and over against the facts of his environment? Instead of theories advanced in the name of science which deny the self-conscious, purposive, and responsible character of human life, we look to the scientist himself, whose work slyly reveals the very qualities his theories seem to deny.

For confirmation of the Christian view we must look to men themselves. In ceaseless interplay with one another, as well as in lonelier moments of self-revelation, the truth of its assumptions about man bears in upon us. Prayer must cling firmly to this psychological rootage. It is not, at its best, a whistling in the dark or the easy sedative assurance that all's right with the world. It is built closely upon the reality which man knows himself to be in his most intimate self—a strangely twofold reality, for he grips the earth even while he thrusts up toward the stars.

It is this duality in our living that brings us to the point of prayer. Our resources are unequal to our tasks. Our problems are too much for us. We sense our present inadequacy and turn in prayer to the source from which our help may come. This sense may come home to us as the aftermath of personal failure or disappointment. It may be precipitated by fear, ranging from the shock of man's inhumanity to man to stark terror before the cataclysmic destructiveness of "Nature, red in tooth and claw." It may come by way of sublime awe before the mystery of human birth and death or through the immensity of stellar spaces which stirred Pascal. It may be fostered instead by gratitude when, after passing through the dark valley of crisis, a man or woman emerges upon broad plains of relief and new-found security.

Critics of religion from Lucretius to Freud have supposed that prayer grows out of fear rather than gratitude. The principle of the fear-motive does, to be sure, take in a wide range of fact. It accounts neatly for Voodoo terrorism, Aztec cruelty, or the more unlovely aspects of Christian asceticism, to mention only a few examples of religion's darker side. But it cannot explain so well the joyous corn dance of Pueblo Indians, the fiesta spirit of a Mexican town on its saint's day, nor the Pentecostal spirit of the followers of Jesus, to mention some illustrations of its brighter side.

It is simply not true to say that fear is the only religious motive. The history of religion is packed with instances of grateful and joyous recognition by

worshipers of undeserved or unexpected good. True prayer often begins with a sob or catch in the throat, but it springs quite as plainly from the sheer thrill of being alive, the sense of wonder, or the intuition of goodness. Even primitive man prays from gratitude as well as from fear, and each of us has known grateful surprise for a dream come true, a further range of life opened up by new love or friendship, or a sudden flashing moment when "joy comes forth from sorrow, and light from terrors past."

One gray morning in Chartres we watched a happy procession come up the winding streets and into the great cathedral, welcomed at the West Portal by the inevitable functionary adorned with gold braid and ornamental staff. Boys and girls and older folk all carried bunches of flowers; before them was borne precariously on a pole the image of their patron saint. It was a guild of gardeners and their families worshipfully expressing, as was their immemorial custom, joy in their trade and dedication to their task of surrounding human life with the beauty and nourishment of growing things. The words of a modern Catholic came home with fresh meaning: "The final note of religion is joy." Joy like this is one of the authentic notes of prayer.

But joyous gratitude no less than fear and awe is an expression of our need. Like them it is a recognition that we depend for our good upon a source of help not in ourselves alone. The eager, adoring thankfulness which rushes like a mighty wind through the music of Bach or Palestrina is quite as telling an ad-

mission as fear of the smallness in ourselves set in the midst of the greatness beyond ourselves.

By whatever avenue of experience the admission of need comes, it forms the human soil from which true prayer springs. In any group of persons gathered for public worship the consciousness of need is present. It may take mild or aggravated form. It may be poignantly or only dimly there. It is the function of the prayer to search out and lay bare these deep-lying yearnings, that men and women by its penetrating power may be brought to themselves.

Since the pastoral prayer is necessarily spoken and public it expresses the more enduring, critical, and common of human needs. It must take people where it finds them, with their private wants and wishes, but it cannot leave them there. Realizing that what they want is not always what they need, its maker must by his words and manner probe their hearts and kindle their minds that their wills may be made strong.

The lasting, urgent, and general needs of a group of worshipers may be personal or social in form. It may be something in the interior depths of a personality or a feeling that "the times are out of joint" which gives rise to the stimulus of need. Also, these needs may be positive or negative in content. Is it the presence of something unworthy that brings us to the plane of honest prayer? Or is it the absence of something worthy, the lack within and among ourselves of that attitude, vision, or energy which can transform and transfigure life?

A first recurring type of need arises from the feeling to which a man may be driven, perhaps by the dulling grind of poverty or drudgery, that there is no meaning in and for his living. In such a mood he may cry out with Edward Arlington Robinson, "I cannot find my way, there is no star."¹

Or his need may take social form. Looking out upon a world in shambles, feeling the full force of cynicism as he contemplates the senseless scrambling for profit or the sudden hurling of men who have loved life into the maelstrom of war and death, he may convict the whole scene of meaninglessness. Then his life and that of his fellows seem fit to be described in words which Stravinsky wrote on a score for orchestra—"to be played without any expression whatever." Perhaps those mournful words of Koheleth come back to such a man,—"all is vanity, all is vanity."

To a person in this state the world may not make sense because it lacks direction and value, like the dark wood without a straight path in which Dante was lost. Or it may not make sense because what purpose and meaning it has seems a hectic, crisscross welter without pattern, balance, or center, a Tower of Babel echoing with confusing cries and jangling voices.

Such a person's lack may be called meaninglessness. For whatever reason, he is in a position to appreciate Thomas Hobbes' description of human life as "nasty,

¹ Quoted from *The Collected Poems of Edwin Arlington Robinson*, by permission of the publishers, The Macmillan Company.

brutish and short." If he looks to God at all, he will seek Him as the source and support of meaningfulness. If he should turn to God in prayer, he will think of Him in terms of Mind. His God, like the World Reason of the Stoics or the Logos of the Fourth Gospel, will take shape and substance out of his search for meaningful order and pattern in experience.

Or here is a person seated in the church at the time of worship who has been brought face to face with a recognition of weakness. Soft living, continued bad health, or excessive dependence upon others may be responsible. His feelings of insecurity and his progressive inability to cope with situations may often reach neurotic proportions, sometimes breaking out in fancied worries and imaginary complaints or being covered up by compensating bluff and big talk. Karen Horney has aptly sketched this sort of person.

According to Horney this person may feel his weakness positively or negatively. It may be his own paralyzing lassitude of will, or rather the overwhelming force of opposing wills upon him, which he considers the source of his weakness. And it may take predominantly social form, like the hopelessness which gripped the German people after the first World War or the feeling of despair which we so often express in the words "What can we do?" To this latter group belong more leaders and followers in progressive movements than we like to think, folk who have watched their dreams and plans come under the chilling rain of a general despondency.

Such a person's need is clearly for strength. Not neurotic compensation for weakness but sane and forthright competence in meeting the issues of life should be prayer's gift to him. If like Friedrich Nietzsche he cannot see his way clear to believe in God, he may at least come to believe, as Nietzsche did, in a Will-to-Power urging and stirring each level of the cosmic process. If he should be persuaded of the reality of the Christian God he will doubtless think of Him in terms of Power. He may be helped at the point of his need by the strain in Christian thought, stretching from its Hebraic beginnings through Augustine and Calvin, which thinks of God as Will. Such a God's dominion is expressed in the plenitude of creation and enjoys sovereignty over all that is. We feebly try to catch its scope and depth in such human analogies as "King" and "Lord."

There is another worshiper whose gnawing problem is friendlessness, a frequent cause of meaninglessness or weakness as well. Even David Hume confessed rather wryly that when he played backgammon with his friends his scepticism flew out of the window! Friendlessness is very familiar to those of religious bent. There was Elijah, supposing that only he was left faithful to God and asking that his life be taken from him. There was Jesus, whose pained words, "Could ye not watch with me one hour?", must still haunt the consciences of his self-named followers. There is the lonely note struck by the words of a Negro spiritual, "Sometimes I feel like a motherless chile, a long way from home." These brief vignettes

of friendlessness come poignantly home to our hearts. We who are made of human stuff endure pain, disaster, even death, often gladly and with a marvelous resiliency; but, as Aristotle soberly reminded us, without friends we should not care to live.

To feel forsaken, abandoned, bereft does not constitute mere tragedy for the religious life. Often it furnishes its great incentive, sometimes its very condition. What the mystics call "the dark night of the soul" shrouds many psalms and prophetic writings in our own tradition. Mohammed and Gautama, not less than Jesus, knew its bitterness. Frequently solitariness has been deliberately sought and practiced as an opportunity for self-knowledge, awareness of the Good and renewal of loyalty and devotion to it.

Yet when friendlessness is not sought but thrust upon him a person finds it desperate rather than promising. Like those whose root-need is for meaning or strength, he may experience his need simply as the absence of friends, an aching void of unresponsiveness. Or, also like them, he may feel it more positively as something in himself which disables him for making and keeping friends. The craving of such a person for affection frequently exceeds his capacity for giving it.

Whether such a need is felt primarily as personal maladjustment or as social misfortune, brought upon one by the hard destinies of job or class or neighborhood, it should find expression in prayer. Knowing so well what it is to be lost, the friendless person will seek to be found by God. His thought of God will

naturally high-light the friendly, responsive side of divinity. Such old words as "grace," "mercy," and "forgiveness" may gain warm freshness of meaning. He may find comfort in the image of the good shepherd in the twenty-third psalm. He may not be greatly impressed by the dogma of the divinity of Christ, but when he hears a distinguished thinker of our time describe Christ as "the human face of God" his heart will be strangely stirred.

All the vast current in Christian piety and thought which stresses God as the great Companion, as the friendliness of the universe toward man at his best, will lend the one who needs a friend its mighty aid. If perchance he has also found a congenial, like-spirited company within his church, he will say, with many a newcomer to an unfamiliar place, "I was a stranger and ye took me in." Such human fellowship will naturally be his starting-point for the thought of God.

These are some persistent needs within a worshiping group. They illustrate the truth of the old saying, "Need teaches us to pray." The prayer, if it is to be truly pastoral, finds its members where they are and speaks to their condition. In this way it observes what we have called the principle of self-discovery. This requires deep and sensitive pondering by the maker of the prayer, a skilful use of all the clues his contacts with his people can yield. It requires further that real needs shall not be confused with surface wants so that the prayer is not lowered to the level of selfish or thoughtless asking. Again, it means that

the prayer becomes most specific in its bearing on the individual when the needs it gathers into its packet of words are most common. The more our prayers discover needs which are shared by many, the closer home to more individuals they will come.

It has become customary to speak of corporate prayer as mainly a priestly act. There is value in this way of looking at the matter only if the pastoral function of the prayer is also given its due. The vision of holiness which prayer glimpses, now and again, has as its necessary consequence the discovery of oneself as needful, creaturely man. As it was with Isaiah in the temple, so it is with us. The pastoral prayer is the minister's great opportunity to bring his people to themselves on the common level of their deepest needs. It may become a fire fed by the fuel of human urgency and blazing with the glory of the coming of the Lord.

CHAPTER THREE

The Kingdom and the Glory

The way of a man is not in himself.

The Imitation of Christ

PRAYER is a singularly two-sided experience. It is constituted not only by the needs we feel but also by the ends we seek. If truly effective, it brings us to ourselves; but it also takes us out of ourselves. "The soul's sincere desire," consciousness of need, is its incentive; yet back of the incentive lies the ideal. John Bunyan put the matter with his quaint clearness:

Prayer, without the heart be in it, is like a sound without life; and a heart, unless it be lifted up of the Spirit, will never pray to God.

Careful observation of the principle of self-discovery in making prayers guarantees that the heart will be in it. A second principle of effectiveness now concerns us. If the heart is to be lifted up—and this is a condition of true prayer—there is required a sense of highest Good which shall carry us up and out of our immediate needs, laying claim to our whole allegiance. This principle we shall call self-commitment.

It is, after all, what we give ourselves to that is the surest measure of prayer's worth. The needs of which we are aware grow from the vision of possibility we have attained. The invasion of an imperishable dream keeps us unsatisfied and fosters in us the urgency of need.

We face, then, the question as to what are the goals of prayer and how they function in experience. There seem to be two interdependent yet different emphases in the approach to God. These are fellowship and worship.

Fellowship is not merely an aim of public prayer but its very condition. Such prayer is a social act; Bernard Meland even speaks of it as "folk-hunger." Its occasion is the gathering together of like-minded folk; its context is a community of purpose and allegiance.

Even the lonely person praying in his quiet room at night, or the Mohammedan who calls on Allah at noonday in the trackless desert, brings to mind the fellowship in which by faith and hope he stands. Imaginatively he fortifies his solitude with his own cloud of witnesses. His words are molded by the tradition in which he is most at home; his thoughts and feelings are flavored by the customs and folkways of his people; his very yearnings take shape under the conservative influence of group habits and standards.

How much more is this true of public prayer! It expresses the fact of human community. It is a fellowship of kindred minds, a token of the blest tie that binds together those of varied stations and capacities

in oneness of spirit. The will to be together which stirs in the universe from molecule to star-cluster, from pack to nation, grows incandescent at the words: "Let us pray." The single worshiper is buoyed up and sustained by the visible presence of fellow-travelers along his way of life. As Luther wrote of the Lord's Prayer, it "binds the people together, and knits them one to another, so that one prays for another, and together one with another."

A requirement of the principle of self-commitment must therefore be the effort to strengthen the oneness and solidarity of the visible worshiping group. The members of such a group come from many homes and situations, with all the prejudices and privileges that keep them hedged in from one another. The pastoral prayer should draw them together and reinforce their sense of belonging to each other. That is one way in which it can achieve the fellowship it seeks.

It is not only the visible group at worship which prayer must seek to bind together. There is that glorious company of founders and fathers of the faith, the long host of revered and mighty ones, as well as countless humble and unknown others who, in their time and manner, have trod the path in which the present generation walks. Beyond the visible fellowship lies the invisible host of those loved long since and lost awhile. The pastoral prayer is a task for the sympathetic imagination by which the arbitrary exclusiveness of time and place is broken through. In prayer the visible group is caught up in the longer

perspectives of its faith, finding deep-rooted kinship with the past.

George Santayana has defined piety as "reverent attachment to the sources of one's being, and the steadyng of life by that attachment."¹ The sources of one's being as a Christian are centrally in Christ. Though Christian prayer may not always be directed to Christ it is normally and naturally offered in the name of Christ. The edifice of the invisible fellowship is incomplete without its cornerstone, and pastoral prayer offered in the Christian community must seek continually to refresh and invigorate worshipers with the reminder that their needs are lifted up, their aims invoked, "through Jesus Christ our Lord." For Christ is that Center of fellowship who gives it warmth and vitality, unity and continuity. The closing phrase of the prayer is simply a recalling of heart and mind to the Source of a Christian's being so that life may be steadied by a reverent attachment to Him. Its form of words should be pregnant with these spiritual overtones if prayer is to realize in any measure the fellowship it seeks.

Yet prayer expands human fellowship even beyond the boundaries of the invisible church and its Lord. It is possible to be so concerned with the Christian faith that those outside its circle are forgotten. The theologians of an earlier day did not hesitate to affirm that those who had never known the Christian revelation were doomed through no fault of their own to

¹ From *Reason in Religion*, by George Santayana. Quoted by permission of the publishers, Charles Scribner's Sons.

eternal punishment. This seems fantastic and unthinkable to most of us today, and rightly so. There are hungry children far across the world, leaden-eyed, despairing poor just around the corner, soldiers killing and being killed on distant fields of battle. Prayer that is truly Christian reaches out beyond the Christian circle to call them in; if it self-righteously includes in its concern only those within the fellowship, that fellowship itself becomes static and stagnant.

It is a sure function of prayer within the church to make imaginatively real the claims of these others upon the Christian conscience. How much more aware of them we become through praying for them than in preaching about them! We talk indefinitely about their plight, promote programs for their betterment, or take up collections for their help; here, in the moment of prayer, we can awaken to their needs as if they were our own, according to the degree to which these are intuitively pictured by him who offers it. If prayer be of this sort, it fosters within us and among us the Love that will not let us go.

Not only this more universal social fellowship, but now and again a fellowship with nature, belongs properly to the aims of prayer. The *Little Flowers* of Francis of Assisi reveals how religiously important that longing may be and how sensitively expressed. For him the whole choir of heaven and furniture of earth formed a vast family whose every voice praised God in its own way. Our brother the sun, our sister the moon, our mother the earth, together with nature's humbler members, were creatures who, like

men, felt the lure back to the springs of their being.

In the poor prose of thought what Francis said was that animals and plants, stars and climatic changes reveal another side than mere physical process. They, too, are creatures who owe their existence to God. So they praise Him and give Him the glory, as in the Old Testament the morning stars are pictured as singing together and the mountains as clapping their hands.

Behind such vivid awareness of nature in its creaturely, aspiring aspect lies the same deep-rooted human wish to be at home in the world which peopled grottoes with elves and clouds with spirits in the childhood of our racial imagination. It comes out still in the urge we feel now and again to identify ourselves with the good earth and growing things. Men seek traces of kinship and likeness with nature even though confronted by its brute otherness and terrifying immensity. The impulse that sends us out from the smoke-pall and dirty streets of cities into the clean freshness of country fields, or makes us thirst for the arduous ways of the sea, or lures us over stubborn, unyielding rocks above timberline and across summer snowfields into vast chasms where eagles cry—this is the urge to become more consciously a part of the ageless, austere working of nature, that working which we address in prayer as God.

Fellowship with God is the rarest, most hallowed gift of prayer. Very seldom, perhaps, do human beings come even to the verge of such an experience.

The mystics have brought back reports of that better country in which God's presence moves. Once in a great while a churchgoer may, in a still and sudden moment, find the windows of heaven opened. We cannot all be mystics and, as Heiler has told us, we must seek always to keep balance between mystical and prophetic religion. But we who pray must be mystical, seeking ever

through all this fleshly dresse
Bright shoothes of everlastingnesse.

If such a sense should come our way at all it will almost certainly be mediated through the "fleshly dresse" of fellowship with others of our own kind or with nature. In prayer the lesser fellowship is the vessel with which we fill the greater, pouring into it all the conceptual meaning, imaginative symbolism and emotional richness which life can offer. We say "Father," and human parenthood becomes a token and pledge of the whole human family under the care of God. We say "love," and somehow the way of a man with a maid or of friend with friend lightens our thoughts of God's way with us. Even as we move from the intimate out to the ultimate we hear a deeper music throbbing through the closer, louder strains of human living.

Yet, though it uses the tones and colors of humanity and nature, prayer strives toward the greatest fellowship of all. The ancients defined it as "the climbing up of the heart toward God." The fellowship which prayer seeks is an expanding circle, cir-

cumscribed only by the reality and the love of God. Anselm of Canterbury pictured well that striving:

Up now, slight man! Flee, for a little while, thy occupations; hide thyself, for a time, from thy disturbing thoughts. Cast aside, now, thy burdensome cares, and put away thy toilsome business. Yield room for some little time to God; and rest for a little time with Him. Enter the inner chamber of thy mind; shut out all thoughts save that of God, and such as can aid thee in seeking Him; close thy door and seek Him.

From the visible to the invisible fellowship, from the nearer to the farther, from self-discovery to self-commitment, is the movement of the experience of prayer.

We have said that the second goal bearing upon the experience of prayer is worship. The word means "worth-ship," which suggests that it is an experience of worth, a worthy experience. There are many kinds of worth—bodily, social, economic and esthetic. Generally we may think of two degrees of worth: that which is good for something else, like money or food, and that which is good in its own right, like beauty or a good will. Philosophers have called these extrinsic or intrinsic worth respectively. We have then to inquire what the distinctive worth of worship is.

Rather than summarize weighty discussions of this matter or offer a new approach to it, let us content ourselves with recalling some of the most important aspects of worship as an experience.

We may note first that worship is neither a purely practical attempt to control worth, like buying and selling, nor, like appreciation of the beautiful, a purely contemplative enjoyment. Discussion of worship has tended to fall into one or the other of these interpretations; but a careful regard for what actually goes on in the experience suggests rather that worship has both a practical and an appreciative side. It is more like creative artistry than either of these other activities alone. It uses the dispositions of the worshipers, the objects around them, patterns of words and music and the channels through which they are expressed, to shape its distinctive act in the light of greatest Good. As in making beautiful things, the worshiper uses all that can aid him in his quest but shapes them by the power of a Good that uses him.

Again it may be pointed out that worship is a rhythmic experience. It embodies what William Ernest Hocking has finely called the principle of alternation, occurring as a kind of interlude between knowing, doing, and the more effortful moods of human life. Worship requires its devotees to come apart from a world that is too much with them. To enter into its rewards we must wisely exclude for a time the thronging press of duties, habits, and associations which make up everyday experience. The appointments of the place of worship, the postures and gestures appropriate to it, the very atmosphere of hushed expectancy, the sense of shared and solemn purpose, make it unique and different from the other things which human beings do.

Within itself, too, worship is a rhythm of moods as we shall later see, moving from awareness of God to humble self-knowledge, then to an asking for needed things, gratitude for good things, and reaffirmation of God as sufficient for the needs of life.

Thirdly, as already stated, worship is a total human response to the total worth of reality, not a partial response to a fragment of reality. When Huxley said, "It does not take much of a man to make a Christian but it takes all there is of him," he was speaking the sober truth. Worship calls the whole man into play—heart and mind and will. And its object is not this aspect of things or that but rather the whole of things in so far as it seems good. When our worship loses this cosmic note it becomes trivialized and moralized and lacks the salt of generality which is its true savor.

A fourth way to characterize worship is to say that it is sacramental. We remember here Augustine's famous definition of a sacrament as "the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace." Part of the meaning of this great idea is conveyed by the word "symbol," which literally signifies that one thing stands for another. A word itself, of course, is a symbol. It points the mind beyond itself to that for which it stands. Worship is symbolic in a far more complex sense. Its visible objects and behavior stand for something else from which their significance is derived. The ritual laughter and hand-clapping of Shinto ceremonies, the graceful posturing of a Balinese dancer or the swaying and humming of a

Negro congregation are symbolic in this way. They are outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual grace. We even find a kind of symbolism in nature, as in the marvelously coherent responsiveness of a flight of birds. On the human level, however, and particularly in the worship experience, the symbolism is far more complicated and awe-inspiring.

Another meaning of the sacramental is suggested by the psychological fact of the sense of presence. Though the more striking examples of the experience come from the mystics, most of us have undoubtedly known it in milder form. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst" is the very core of worship. Martin Luther knew this sense best in the church:

At home, in my own house, there is no warmth or vigor in me, but in the church when the multitude is gathered together, a fire is kindled in my heart and it breaks its way through.

If only the vibrant, warming fire of the spirit that makes us one could break its way through more often and surely in our public worship, it would be far more sacramental than it customarily is. Without some sense of presence, invisible but real, that presence so magnificently suggested in Wordsworth's *Ode* or the music of César Franck, weaving its spell about those gathered together and binding them firmly into kindled devotion, true worship cannot be.

Fifth, we may get at the heart of worship by describing it as sacrificial. The most primitive types of

worship were sacrifices. It is a long way from the Brahmans' notion that the gods smelled the smoke of the burnt offerings and were pleased, to the Hebrew prophets, who declared that a humble and contrite heart was the only sacrifice acceptable to God, but the sacrificial idea and motive is permanent. So it must ever be in worship.

A distinguished anthropologist, R. R. Marett, has said that the origin of religion lies in the birth of humility. At the center of worship which is truly sacrificial there is not only a passive receiving but an active giving. Prayer aiming at worship does not endeavor to coerce, bribe, curry favor, or bargain with God. It seeks to put what the worshipers have and are at the disposal of their Most High, to lift up their deepest needs creatively in the light of their highest aims. It gives as well as takes.

The two functioning goals of prayer as an experience are interwoven and interdependent. The visible fellowship is possible only through worship operating as its purpose. Herein lies the great advantage of public worship over private devotion. It makes each of us aware that his lonely need is one among many others, then takes us out of ourselves and even out of our group into the furthest limits of the heart and mind. The surest bond between man and man is the common worship of a loving God.

But fellowship, visible and invisible, human and natural, gives local habitation and a name to the austere Reality adored in worship. The ultimate reality affirmed in prayer is to be illustrated in the

nearer facts of society and nature. For it is always true that

Heaven gives its glimpses only to those
Not in position to look too close.²

And so unless the neighbor, field, and mountain speak to us of God, God may not speak to us at all. Worship and fellowship enhance one another and thereby enrich our living with dimensions of surprise and splendor.

These high functions of public prayer grant it a far more important place in worship than might be supposed from the frequently casual and secondary attention it receives. A mechanical saying of pious stereotypes is frankly unforgivable in view of prayer's source deep within the intimacy of human needs and its goals high in the fellowship and worship of the church. Habitual or hurried prayer can never realize its lofty possibilities.

The nature of prayer itself as a human experience, when honestly and sensitively understood, remedies our feeble and faltering renditions of it in corporate worship. A compulsion is laid upon us to deepen the self-discovery which awareness of need brings, and to strengthen and heighten the self-commitment which is grounded in communion and inspired by reverence.

Could there be any more notable expression of this experience of need, companionship, and exaltation which is prayer than the words of that greatest of all

² From *The Collected Poems of Robert Frost*. Quoted by permission of the publishers, Henry Holt and Company.

pastoral prayers which is the pattern of Christian piety? Let us recall it afresh in the perspective of our intimate experience of ultimate good:

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. *Amen.*

CHAPTER FOUR

The God Who Hears Prayer

Right prayer sees nothing substantial,
and worth the looking after, but God.

John Bunyan

WHEN we have said that prayer is a certain kind of human experience, we have not exhausted the matter. We have still to consider the worshipful Reality which is its object. For prayer proceeds on the assumption that we are confronted with such a Reality, over against ourselves, which sustains, rebukes, chastens or uplifts us, and to which in worship we come in wonderment, humility, thanksgiving, and allegiance.

The setting of Christian prayer is a dynamic contrast of man with God. Here two planes of life intersect and by their tension provoke us to new areas of vision, new responsibilities, new endeavors. William Blake's mystical strenuousness, George Herbert's quiet happiness, and William Wordsworth's lofty assurance were born in such a contrast between what is imperfect and what is perfect, transitory and eternal, sordid and sublime. They were poets of religion who felt within and around themselves the

ecstatic sweetness, the terrifying vastness, the patient undergirding power of God.

The saints and mystics of the church have likewise discovered dimensions in life which seem more than human. They speak of God as a flame warming the heart, as a star lighting the human path or a surging sea on which life tosses and is upborne. At times they even use the imagery of intimate love to suggest the indescribable rapture of contact with the divine. There is, in all prayer and worship worthy of the name, this awesome togetherness, this tender apartness, of God and man.

So we come to a third principle for making our prayers effective: the principle of dynamic contrast. Like the others it grows out of the very nature of prayer itself. Every prayer should move between two poles, which we have described as intimate experience and ultimate good. Here is man—standing in need and seeking a kingdom and glory not of his making but forever beyond him. There is God—giving reality to worship, responding in ways past finding out to man's yearnings or rebuking his pretensions by searching and finding his secret places. Such is the stage where the drama of prayer is played; and such is the principle to be observed if prayer is really to speak to men of God and to God for men.

Behind and beyond prayer as a human experience, then, lies the reality of God. At least the worshiper believes it to be so and seeks to live as if his belief were true. We have in this chapter to face three questions about that belief. What in fact does prayer as-

sume about God? Does such a God exist? What can we truthfully expect from prayer to God?

If our prayers are to be offered in sincerity and truth we must become aware of the ideas with which we pray. When, for example, we say, "Almighty God," we need to know what the words mean. Do we honestly accept the idea of God as omnipotent which Calvin defended and Schubert magnificently set to music? Or are we simply paying a thoughtless compliment to Him? We owe it to ourselves, to those whom we lead in worship, and in a profound sense to God, to see to it that the God to whom we pray is the same God in whom we have reason to believe.

This does not mean that prayer must wait upon thought. Our hopes and needs are impetuous and insistent as our thoughts are not. Yet the worshiper is not permanently content with wishing and hoping but wants to know what the chances are that wishes and hopes may come true. An irrational faith has not been characteristic of Christianity but of its enemies. The branches of worship sway loftily in the air of imagination and desire, but the sturdy roots of reason must nourish and sustain their growth. Faith will always outrun understanding; but the ceaseless testing and re-examining of our beliefs is one essential part of what it means to worship in sincerity and truth.

Taking this task seriously involves a thorough house-cleaning of many prevailing habits. Many a young minister, fresh from the critical life of the seminary, has gone into a parish where a great gulf

was fixed between his own and his people's ideas of God. It has been easy for him to drift into ways of speech which were popular or expected, in spite of the fact that what he meant when he said them was not at all what his people meant when they heard them. A subtle dishonesty then creeps into his praying and often into his whole ministry which makes impossible the frank sharing of Christian ideas so essential to wise and fruitful leadership.

A large part of one's preparation for leadership in prayer thus becomes the honest and rigorous thinking-through of what his words and actions assume to be true. These assumptions are simple but tremendous. They often lie beneath the prayer's verbal surface, but they are inescapably there. It is not only dishonest to pray to a God in whom one does not believe; it makes worship a farce and a mockery. We shall do well, therefore, to give reasons for the faith that is in us.

The first and fundamental assumption of prayer is that God exists. Every time we begin with the words, "O God," we assume a reality worthy of the name. But to say that we assume the reality of God does not mean much until we say what we actually mean by it. We have to make our assumption clearer.

For example, I do not ordinarily doubt that the desk at which I write or the stone against which I stub my toe is real, but is God real in the same sense? Nor do I customarily question the reality of wife and child and friends, but is God's the same reality as theirs? Also I assume the reality of many things even

though I have never seen them. Only a professional sceptic doubts the reality of the other side of the moon or of the arctic circle. Is God, then, "whom having not seen, we love," similarly real? Again, I take it that I have ideals, purposes, and desires by which I am moved to act as I would not act without them. Is God real as they are real? And I do not doubt the reality of the laws of gravity or electricity; shall I suppose, then, that God's reality is like that of a law of science?

Probably no two of us have identical ideas of God. Each of us, working on the basis of his own experience and standing in his own tradition, fills in his idea of God with personal and social meaning. There are some whose devotion and intelligence require a God as dependably, undoubtedly there as stone or desk. Others think that God must be personal in order to be God at all. Still others find the only worshipful God to be a "wholly other" God, infinitely distant from earth and human ways. There are those, like the present-day humanists, to whom God is a name for inner values, not an Object confronting us. And others of scientific or philosophical bent use the name God as an abstract principle governing the how or why of events. But wherever we stand and whatever our personal perspective, it is our responsibility to come to terms with a reasonable idea of God.

At this point a hard-headed reader may protest that this is unnecessary. He will assure us that when he uses the word, God, he means exactly what he says. God has been defined again and again, he may

point out; the creeds, the Bible, and the Christian tradition are good enough for him. Why is it not better to stop threshing over old theological straw and get down to the kernels of worship and service?

We may sympathize with such common-sense impatience without being taken in by it. There are two very good reasons why we cannot take the authoritarian road. One is that a person who believes in God on authority (he will usually say "on faith") must justify his belief to others who, if they believe at all, must do so on grounds different from his. A missionary seeking to justify his belief in one God to some polytheistic natives cannot get very far with "The Bible tells me so," and it is a rare congregation at home for whom it is enough that the minister tells them so.

Another reason for refusing to go in this direction is that for us there is no simple, single word of authority. If we depend, as we must, on the Bible for our idea of God, shall it be the God of Gideon or Hosea, the God of human sacrifice or of loving kindness, whom we worship? Each of us must do in the end what Origen, Luther, Bunyan, and the rest have done—choose from the whole range of Biblical literature our own "small Bibles" which are normative for our devotional living. Whether we like to admit it or not, our ideas of God are compounded out of private and public, contemporary and traditional experience, seen from our own unique perspectives.

There is an apocryphal story about Jesus meeting a man who was working on the Sabbath. Instead of

reprimanding him for disobeying the Jewish law he said to him, "If thou knowest what thou art doing, blessed art thou." Our task in the pastoral prayer is too important to be carried on in an intellectual vacuum or confusion. If we know what we are doing as we pray, we shall be blessed indeed.

Of course our thoughtful and prayerful uses of the word, God, must differ. Love and devotion require glowing words, while thought demands cautious, precise ones. Yet knowledge and belief are mutually needed in the religious life.

There are two great and historic principles of Christian thought which come to our help. The one is Anselm's, "I believe in order to understand." Naturally we do, whether as Christians, parents, scientists, lovers, or artists. We project our structures of knowledge out from its foundations by means of faith, as a cantilever bridge reaches out from opposite shores to join its span over the river below. In our century William James stoutly defended this principle.

There is a second, complementary principle. It was stated by Thomas Aquinas: "Faith is above reason but not contrary to reason." Faith, to be sure, exceeds our reason, and life cannot wait for logic. But our faith is surer and better for being tested by reason. Just as an engineer checks the actual progress of a building by the exacting specifications of his blue-prints, so the enterprise of prayer needs constantly to be weighed in the scales of the critical intelligence.

These two principles, taken together, are indis-

pensable to the maker of prayers who is anxious to offer them in sincerity and truth. Anselm even put into a prayer this religious need for honesty in belief: "Help me, just and compassionate God, whose light I seek; help me to understand what I say." May his prayer be our own!

Now what is the meaning of prayer's assumption that God exists? Is it not simply that there is a Reality over against us which yet responds to us, a "stupendously rich Reality," in the words of Baron Friedrich von Hügel? If no such reality exists, the whole business of prayer falls to the ground. It becomes auto-suggestion, or worse, auto-hypnosis. It becomes a monologue, not a dialogue. Prayer of the Christian sort stands or falls on the assumption that God is, and responds to needful, aspiring men.

Christian thought has traditionally identified the divine responding with love. The second great assumption prayer makes about God is that He is love. Augustine expressed this in the noble phrase: "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in Thee." And Pascal's saying that we would not seek God had we not already found him declares the same truth. This means that prayer is not only a request from the human end of the dynamic contrast but man's answer to the worshipful, loving Reality round about him. It means, too, that prayer is not so much an attempt to change God's mind as a way of putting ourselves where God may change us. God's love is not only the prayer's answer but its cause.

Such an idea lifts prayer from the barbaric to the Christian plane. Much in our common prayer-ways is both pre-Christian and pre-scientific. There is no doubt a large amount of unreasonable selfishness in praying for rain, military victory, or recovery of health. But from the Christian point of view such prayers also contain their measure of truth, for they assume that we must constantly take account of that order not ourselves on which we depend for growth, success, and health. These are all goods of human life through which God expresses his love, whether by chastening or comforting us. Our prayers are fundamentally answerable, whether God answers them precisely as we wish or not, for there exists, says the Christian, a divine responsiveness and a divine initiative which is the order of love.

This assumption hangs upon another, that God is good. At its characteristic best, Christian thought has said that the environing order of human life, however disappointing or indifferent it may seem occasionally, displays a grain and trend of goodness. Only if God be good can He love or cause men to love Him in return. Men can and do discover that goodness, not as a whimsical favoring of their needs or hopes but as an enduring order of rightness confronting them at every moment of their lives. Now it appears as a "terrible swift sword"; then as "the beauty of the lilies." Whether as the Hound of Heaven or the Good Shepherd, God means that enduring rightness, that inescapable fact of goodness.

A fourth assumption about God belongs to the

life of prayer, that God has power. Too often this has seemed to mean that God is a cosmic dictator whose sovereign majesty foreknows and foreordains all things. But this is not a necessary part of a Christian idea of God. Robert Calhoun has suggested that there are many things which God cannot do precisely because He is God: He cannot act unjustly, or unwisely, or unmercifully. It may well be that God's power is limited by his love and goodness. Yet Christian prayer proceeds in the confidence that He does have power to do what men cannot; that this power works both within and outside ourselves; and that it forms a resource which prayer can tap and lay hold upon.

We come now to the second question of this chapter: Does such a God, as prayer assumes, really exist? It is not enough for us to know what Christians have believed; the real and pressing question is whether a Christian can believe it today. As Alfred North Whitehead has reminded us, we must not expect simple answers to far-reaching questions. If we have lived deeply, as we ought, in the spirit of modernity, this will be a disturbing, unavoidable question. Where shall we look for evidence to support our Christian assumptions? Is the character of the world revealed by science and man's inhumanity to man such as to produce and promote the power, love, and goodness of an existent God?

It is not the purpose of this book to be a theological essay. But it is important to indicate the direction in which we may look for support of the Christian

world-view. A developing, increasing body of thought in our time points to the given facts of mutuality, interaction, and interdependence in social living and natural events as indicative of the activity of God. It may seem a far cry from the rich and concrete imagery of John's Gospel or the medieval epic of creation and salvation to the "process of integration" and "principle of concretion" of current thought. It will be urged that we cannot pray to such abstractions as these, and of course that is true. But it is just such ideas as these which commend our prayers' assumptions to men of our time and make possible clear thinking regarding the Object of our worship.

These abstractions are but statements in rational and contemporary form of what love means. Love is simply not possible among men or on God's part unless the nature of the world in which we live is such as to create and sustain the act and value of loving. These cold gray words state the facts consistent with our knowledge which alone can justify to reason the Christian's warmest and dearest persuasions. Without the assured reality to which they point, love is a will-o'-the-wisp, a self-defeating illusion. Upon them, as its rational foundation, the full abundance of love may be established in our thought.

As Henry N. Wieman has told us, to pray to an idea of God is a pernicious kind of idolatry; but to pray with an idea of God as coherent and adequate as we can make it is required both by wisdom and worship. There is a prayer from the sixteenth century

which catches up this needful unity of thought and life:

God be in my head, and in my understanding;
God be in mine eyes, and in my looking;
God be in my heart, and in my thinking;
God be at mine end, and at my departing.

The third question of this chapter is: What may we truthfully expect from prayer to God? Prayer, with its setting in the dynamic contrast of man and God, assumes that a way is open from both poles of the relationship and that its act is essential to closing the circuit of contact between them.

Two objections are usually offered to this view. One, brought forward by the more pious, holds that it is sacrilegious, for it means that God must be told what we need and hope for rather than knowing it in advance. Certainly many crude prayers imply that God's attention must be caught before they can be effective. But prayer at its best brings about an attitude in him who prays which makes it possible for God to do what he could not do without the prayerful attitude.

We must of course avoid supposing that there is any compelling magic in the words of prayer. There is, however, a magic in its attitude, when genuine and true, a magic so persuasive that words can but set it forth and lift it up. If God responds to men by way of love and goodness and power, it must be because there is in man's heart that purity of which Jesus spoke, which is a willingness to be loved by

God. Far from being sacrilegious, this attitude is the very condition of our approach to what is sacred.

The other objection comes from those of scientific training and bent. The assumption of a co-operative and dependable two-way relationship between God and man, they hold, is superstitious. If natural law really obtains with binding, universal force, how can prayer shift the weight of things in man's favor?

Let it be admitted that a Christian world-view grants the law-abiding character of nature just as science does. If the universe were lawless, as E. S. Brightman observes, there is good reason to believe it would be Godless too. But it must still be said that science itself acts on the belief that human purposes are real and take effect in the natural order. A laboratory experiment, like the building of a house or the painting of a picture, is a purposive enterprise. Prayer, like science, follows the law that our purposes do take effect in nature. If the scientist and the man of prayer are not fooling themselves, the universe in which they both pursue their tasks is purpose-supporting as well as law-abiding.

Thus the same sort of rationality which science follows marks prayer at its best. So George Santayana, who could not be accused of holding superstitious beliefs, calls prayer "the only rational form of life for a spirit that has attained self-knowledge."¹

A careful study of what prayer involves yields the idea of a co-working of man with God, in such wise

¹ From *The Realm of Spirit*, by George Santayana. Quoted by permission of the publishers, Charles Scribner's Sons.

that man's efforts are upborne by a Power not his own and in which his willingness to be changed is an essential part of his being changed by God. We may easily become over-confident about our own importance in the process, which makes prayer not only ultimately meaningless but self-defeating as well. Yet if prayer is to be at all effective the possibility of our co-working with God must exist even though we cannot say in advance what its definite scope and function is.

This expectation must not be uncritical. Though what we pray for is not always what we get, our prayer has not gone unanswered. When Emerson said that if we pray honestly we shall get just what we pray for, and that therefore we ought always to pray for the highest things, he may seem to have contradicted this view. Yet as a matter of fact he meant that our prayers should conform to the character of God. If they do, we shall establish on our part the dependable relationship to God which guarantees the effectiveness of our prayers.

Some of us expect too much from prayer. Others expect too little. The former, more childish notion of prayer leads to much miscalculation and disappointment; the latter sceptical and sophisticated approach keeps our praying from being whole-hearted and natural. But if we can assume and justify the co-operative and dependable relationship between man and God in prayer, our needs and hopes are neither self-defeating nor meaningless but become the medium in which

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God moves in His mysterious way
His wonders to perform.

The dynamic contrast in which prayer is set thus becomes its surest principle of effectiveness. When understood and followed, it brings to the office of prayer a lofty meaning and noble purpose, surrounding it with "the glory of eternal partnership."

CHAPTER FIVE

Prayer as Poetry: Words, Images, and Rhythms

Prayer is . . . the eloquence of destiny.¹

George Santayana

“PRAYER,” writes Bernard Meland, “is turning from the prose of thought to the poetry of praise.”² He might well have added “and penitence,” for, as we have seen, praise is not the sole root of prayer; but he is right to turn our thoughts to the poetry which prayer should embody, for beauty as well as sincerity and truth has its place in the life of the spirit. The maker of beautiful prayers not only experiences and then meditates on the intimate yearning after ultimate good which is prayer’s very self. He is also a creative artist, who bodies forth in patterns of speech the dynamic contrast between God and man which marks the prayerful experience and thought.

In turning from the theory of prayer to its practice, I find it helpful to consider analogies between poetry

¹ From *The Realm of Spirit*, by George Santayana. Quoted by permission of the publishers, Charles Scribner’s Sons.

² From *Modern Man’s Worship*, by Bernard Eugene Meland. Harper & Brothers, publishers.

and prayer. A good prayer is much like a good poem. It is not a mere jumble of words but a word-pattern, an artistic unity. Its pattern, moreover, grows directly out of the poet's purpose.

This is precisely what happens in the making of a worthy poem. Robert Frost has said that what art does for life is to shape it, to strip it to form. Life provides the raw material for art; art stamps life with purpose, bending and molding its chaotic stuff into the finished surfaces of a thing of beauty.

Prayer is also such a shaping of raw experience by the structures and power of speech. There is an unmistakable poetry of prayer. Its intimacy of appeal and ultimacy of direction lay upon it a poetic responsibility. Because its rootage is in things near and deep, far and great, prayer demands the warm-blooded, full-bodied utterance, the glowing word and the inspired phrase. Prosaic speech cannot reach or adequately convey its overtones and undercurrents.

A sermon is for the most part a prosaic affair. Since it aims to inform, instruct, or exhort, it appropriately employs the prose of statement. Occasionally a sermon may reach heights of prophetic or mystical purpose where the elevated mood sweeps beyond the medium of prose into the rushing tempo and inspired imagery of poetry. Yet its typical tone and temper are understandably, necessarily prosaic.

If we think of our prayers as extensions of the sermon, sermons in disguise or bare catalogues of needs and hopes by which information is relayed to God or the congregation, then the prose of statement

is quite adequate to the occasion. But if prayer should become for us what we have said it ought to be, then we must accept the poetic responsibility which its purpose lays upon us.

Though we cannot become poets at will we may become lovers of poetry. If ministers were to become lovers of poetry the badness of our prayers would begin to disappear. The only way to grow in poetic appreciation is to read widely in the poets themselves. It is wise not to confine ourselves to self-conscious "moral" or "inspirational" poetry, for most of this is thoroughly bad as poetry and has little to teach us about the all-important difference between distinguished, graceful, and spacious utterance and commonplace, ponderous, and cramping speech. We should read poetry that is poetically great, without regard to its edifying content—poetry of sensuous love or dramatic conflict, of aspiration or despair. Thus we become sharers in the rich heritage of the creative imagination, to the end that our prayers may breathe and pulse with the nobility and tears, the anguish and glory of life itself.

First let us learn what we can from the poetic uses of words. Their chief function historically and their most apparent use today is to communicate. Since words are chosen to "get across" some meaning, feeling, or image, they must be understandable, must be the common coinage of speech. They are the tools of shared experience and must be kept clean and orderly that they may serve their communicative purpose well. When their cutting edges are rough-

ened by over-use or blunted by abuse their outlines are blurred, their meanings are lost. We need to examine them from time to time and often re-sharpen them if they are to establish genuine communication. Here is a first imperative for the use of words in prayer.

Both prayer and poetry use language in another way. They endeavor to call meaning forth as well as to transfer it, to evoke as well as communicate it. A successful poem or prayer has the power to identify us with its mood; meaning not only comes through to us but is awakened in us. Reading of Lear's melancholy makes it momentarily our own. Our inner ear listens with Wordsworth to the "still, sad music of humanity."

So in hearing a prayer that is poetic we are *found* by it. The "mantle of the night" shrouds our spirits only to give way to "the golden glory of the day," and our "gloomy thoughts" are chased away by "the brightness of hope." This evocative use of words stirs to life a wealth of personal meaning, setting reverberations going in us, transfiguring our inner landscape with rays of light and giving wings to our vague and formless yearnings. This is a second goal for the use of words in prayer.

Magnificent poetry and inspired prayer do not consist merely of marks on a page or sound waves impinging on the ear. They bring us to life by invigorating our senses and stinging our wills awake. They are life itself. Archibald MacLeish writes:

A poem should not mean
But be.³

The same quality of “being” is what a prayer should achieve. To realize this in prayer is to enter into a new dimension of language, to be carried out into a fullness of life we had not known before. But we had better stop talking about it and listen :

Weep you no more, sad fountains;
What need you flow so fast?
Look how the snowy mountains
Heaven’s sun doth gently waste.
But my sun’s heavenly eyes
View not your weeping,
That now lies sleeping
Softly, now softly lies
Sleeping.

The sheer evocative magic of such words as these from a seventeenth-century lyric is so great that it brings us out of whatever world we are in at the moment and makes us directly at home in another. They create, they are that world.

Or hear this prayerful poem of John Donne, written in anticipation of his death :

Since I am coming to that holy room
Where, with thy choir of saints for evermore,
I shall be made thy music, as I come
I tune the instrument here at the door,
And what I must do then, do here before.

³ From “Ars Poetica,” published by Houghton Mifflin Company.

The quiet confidence, resigned yet resolute, of these words makes the reading of this poem a living experience for anyone who has eyes to see and ears to listen.

The fact that words may be used in this creative way is a constant stimulus to the prayer-maker. If we would appropriate something of their power we must live with words until they come alive. We need to guard against falling into the pitfalls of lovely cadences or sonorous syllables uttered for their own sweet sakes. We should scrupulously avoid dishonest words, words that lull when we want them to stimulate, or bite when we want them to comfort. Here again a sure sense of the prayer's purpose keeps us from verbal over-indulgence, on the one hand, and under-nourishment, on the other.

If we read poetry with a view to bettering our prayers we shall learn a third important lesson about words. There are poetic words and non-poetic words. "Nightingale," "sad fountains" and "choir of saints" have an immediate poetic suggestiveness that is denied, for example, to "non-visual stimulation" or "double predestinarianism." The boundaries of poetic diction vary with the person and the era.

There is also an important distinction between conservatism and revolt in the area of poetic convention. Wordsworth felt the inadequacy of the high-flown poetic diction of his time and substituted a simpler eloquence. In our day Hardy and Frost likewise substituted homelier words for the conventional ornateness of poetry. If Stephen Spender chooses to

make poetry of the present out of the pistons, wheels, and noises of a locomotive—as he most successfully does—we shall have to revise our former boundaries. Yet especially for the beginner in poetry conventionality is a genuine advantage.

Prayerful diction is extremely conventional. It contains really only a few verbs like bless, deliver, guide, help, and give (the last surely more frequent than the others!). There are surprisingly few nouns: mercy, strength, peace, comfort are some of the more customary. The use of Thou and Thee as well as the endings -est and -eth set prayer off as unique from ordinary conversation.

There is a real benefit in these familiar words. Long association has hallowed them with a dignity essential to public prayer. Their very use in prayer has made them prayerful. They have earned their right to communicate and evoke religious meaning. By contrast, scientific, psychological, or technical words are out of place in prayer. They belong to other realms of discourse and only confuse or mislead the heart in its ascent to God.

But there is a peril, too, in these conventional words. When used merely as convention prescribes they are tyrannical. They warp and trim down to a flat formalism the throbbing feelings, longings, and thoughts that break through language and escape.

How, then, does the prayer-maker take full advantage of conventionality without falling into its pitfalls? He selects his words very much as the good poet does. Where nothing of warmth and color is

lost and something of dignity or Christian perspective is gained, he uses the verbal conventions. But where possible and profitable he employs the new, fresh, and at times startling words which have power to evoke the attitudes of prayer. The *Vailima Prayers* of Robert Louis Stevenson are examples of this mingled conventionality and creativeness.

True, making prayers is a public office, which places an added restraint upon the leader. It keeps the conventional, communicative function of words to the fore and hampers their creative, evocative use. Some of the most forceful and breath-taking passages in the literature of private devotion would be shocking to a congregation at worship. John Donne can begin a prayer with

Batter my heart, three-person'd God

but these words could not be used to open a public prayer without confusing and startling the worshipers. Yet the extraordinary freshness of Francis of Assisi's *Canticle to the Sun* or the apocryphal *Song of the Three Children* commends them to public and prayerful use.

In spite of this restraint, which is necessary to all public speech, there are many opportunities for using words in creative ways. For example, symbols like the microphone and the airplane have a forceful directness of meaning which mythical beasts, chain armor, and arks do not. The pity of it is that earnest leaders of worship go on belaboring old words until

they cry for mercy, or until the nodding heads and listless gaze of the worshipers force them back into the molds of living speech. By tirelessly seeking fresh ways of putting old truth we increase our chances of real and fruitful contact with the minds and hearts of those for whom we pray. We may even take a leaf from the book of Henry Adams, who used the dynamo as a symbol of modern life, or from present-day composers who try to make music out of the noises of city traffic.

By using words in these ways we make our prayers more like poetry. We learn not only the virtues of direct and vital communication but the values of the evocative and creative word. We learn that prayer has a language of its own, consisting not of technical or matter-of-fact words but of humane words, words expressive of the profuse variety, color, and pungency of human life. And we learn that conventional usage must be balanced wherever possible and appropriate by fresh, creative, and occasionally unexpected usage, that our prayers may become not vain repetitions but what Santayana has called "the eloquence of destiny."

In a second way poetry affords us suggestive insight. If words are the tools, images are the media of the imagination. They are more or less sharply focused pictures produced by words. They are verbal symbols. It has been said that the guiding principle of symbolism is that one thing stands for another. Images do this in two ways. They may call a thing to mind by likening it to something else or fuse the thing with its symbol in an esthetic identity of feeling.

Examples of the more obvious kind of imagery, the simile, are the first psalm's picture of the upright man:

And he shall be like a tree planted by the streams
of water,
That bringeth forth its fruit in its season . . .

or Robert Burns'

My Luve's like a red, red rose.

The second kind of imagery, the metaphor, goes deeper, identifying itself more boldly with its object. Just as words like "buzz" and "smooth" transfer to sound the very feelings they symbolize, so

The Lord is my shepherd
or

O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being,
do not stop at likeness but affirm esthetic identity.

This is a first thing to be learned about images: in their bolder functioning they do not seem but are. Poetry and prayer may make both uses of them, but the metaphor reaches heights of expressiveness which the simile cannot. Jesus was a master of imagery. The narrow gate, the broad path, the weeds in the wheat field, and the houses built on rock and sand live for themselves, stimulating and holding in the imagination pictures of sharp esthetic outline and deep religious power. Such imagery both enriches and strengthens our public prayers.

Poetic images have a second quality which those who pray should wisely seek. Though they live independently, as particular items in the imagination, they also contribute to the theme of the whole. By being most unmistakably themselves they point us to the essential wholeness of the poem, as does the solo instrument in a symphony or the single pigment in an artist's palette.

The first stanza of Sir Walter Raleigh's poem on "the passionate man's pilgrimage" is a fine example of the detailed concreteness as well as the contributive effectiveness of the successful poetic image:

Give me my scallop-shell of quiet,
My staff of faith to walk upon,
My scrip of joy, immortal diet,
My bottle of salvation,
My gown of glory, hope's true gage,
And thus I'll take my pilgrimage.

How sharply etched each image is and yet how relevant to the whole picture of the pilgrim! There is no superfluous prettiness; each detail is organic to the poem's pattern and purpose.

Imagine now this poetic prayer translated into the form of an average prosaic one:

Oh Lord, give us quietness and faith, that we may be joyful and attain salvation, coming at last into the glory which is the pledge of hope.

Compared with the wordy trimming of some prayers this may not be so bad; at least it has the virtue of

compactness. But how flat, vague and second-hand it is when set beside the poem! It is merely a chain of bare abstractions, strung together with neither artistic nor religious meaningfulness.

What does the poem achieve and the prayer lack? Is it not precisely a togetherness of conventional abstractness and daring imagery which makes the one alive and the other dead? We should not despise abstract nouns, for they give our prayers the expansive scope they need; but we have to clothe their bare bones with the flesh and blood of warm, vibrant images if they are to possess the compellingly vivid and organically contributive character of poetic speech.

As in Raleigh's poem each abstract noun is clothed with imaginative content, and as each image, together with its abstraction, marches toward the whole pattern and thoughtful purpose, so our prayers must attain the same blend of detail and wholeness, moved forward by an instinct for artistic and religious purpose.

There is no better place than the Bible to go to school in this subject. We need scarcely to be reminded that "green pastures" have become synonymous with peace or security and "dark valley" with death or sorrow. The masterly poetry of Jeremiah or Job, the devotional psalms or the parables of the New Testament are rich mines of imagery whose resources are far from exhausted in Christian worship.

Images, when chosen with this double standard in mind, give our prayers the sure poetic touch. Their use involves careful and sensitive artistry. The aim in mind must be not decoration but the imaginative fulfilment of that self-discovery, self-commitment, and sense of dynamic contrast which are the principles of effectiveness.

A third insight into making prayers comes from the poetic uses of rhythm. Rhythm is fundamentally a regular recurrence of sound-stresses, not merely a matter of rhyming lines. Yet it goes even deeper than sound pattern. In her book, *Discovering Poetry*, which is incidentally a fine introduction to genuine appreciation, Elizabeth Drew shows that poetic rhythm is rooted in the still deeper rhythms of night and day, heart and breath, the passing seasons and birth and death.

Poetry, that is, endeavors to symbolize these constant alternations of life and nature in such ways that our sensibilities to them are stimulated above their normal pitch. Its words move in a measured flow of sound, responsive ever to these greater changes—now rushing or tumbling along, now pausing thoughtfully, now urgent with decision. A poet's rhythm is both intensely personal and grandly impersonal. Though echoes of the vast realities of growth and decay, living and dying, sound through it, passages of private disappointment or surprise can be heard even in the midst of grandest cosmic outreach. Dante or Milton finely illustrates this:

How dreadful is this place!
It is the very gate of heaven.

In the middle of the journey of our life
I came to myself in a dark wood
Where the straight way was lost.

What "line" is to the Parthenon frieze-sculptures or to the crucifixion paintings of Dürer and Rembrandt, rhythm is to the poet; it is his patterned marshaling of sound which orders words and images into artistic shape and form.

Rhythm makes our prayers "eloquent with destiny." For language with rhythm is like music with a time-beat. It has a haunting suggestiveness, a flowing, binding power. To choose the humane word or the sensitive image is not enough; these must be welded into the whole pattern with the shaping strength of rhythmic speech.

Put side by side, for instance, a geographical description of Scotland and Burns' "My heart's in the highlands." The former is true as far as it goes. If one wants to mine coal or find the distance between travelling points such a description is useful. But the Burns poem goes further still, expressing not a physical place alone but a spiritual meaning. If you want to know what Scotland means to a Scot you do not consult a geography; you read Burns. And clearly it is largely its rhythmic power that gives the poem the singing joy of homeland which transcends physical description and touches chords of spiritual response.

This is a power our prayers deserve to have. They

may be theologically correct and psychologically sound and yet lack the true quality of prayer. This is a quality which is best expressed in poetic forms. A right use of rhythm is therefore essential to our practice.

Again we turn to the Bible for guidance. We often forget that much of the Bible is poetry. One can select examples of its rhythms almost by chance:

The Lord is my light and my salvation;
Whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the strength of my life;
Of whom shall I be afraid?

O Lord, thou hast searched me and known me.
Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising;
Thou understandest my thoughts afar off.

But where shall wisdom be found?
And where is the place of understanding?
Man knoweth not the price thereof;
Neither is it found in the land of the living.

Hebrew rhythm is based on thought as well as words. It is basically a kind of "parallelism," in which antithetical clauses are balanced against one another or a main clause is developed by means of subordinate ones. Frequently, as in the second and third examples just quoted, both uses occur in the same poem.

This use of rhythm is valuable to the prayer-maker for at least four reasons. It is easily recognized and learned. It has rich devotional associations. It tends to keep the thought-structure of a prayer clear and definite. Finally, it is especially well-suited as an artis-

tic device to portray the dynamic contrast in which all prayer is set. It makes possible, as in the psalms, a polarity of thought between human need and divine response.

There are both positive and negative suggestions arising from the use of poetic rhythms in prayer. Positively, they should always be natural, mirroring the theme or mood they carry forward as flawlessly as possible. The rhythm of a gallop cannot express a sense of loneliness, nor a march that of affectionate longing. Moreover, the rhythms of prayer should themselves be prayerful. This means avoiding all stereotyped ministerial cadences and funereal monotones to the end that real dignity and distinction of speech may be upheld.

Negatively, the rhythms of prayer must not be so self-conscious or obtrusive that they cloy or dull the senses. Neither should they distract us, because of their monotonous regularity, from the thoughts and moods they are meant to convey.

A constant rule to be observed in prayer, as in poetry, is that rhythms vary with the thoughts or feelings they express. Thus, as in Stevenson's well-known prayer, the rhythm grows staccato with moral earnestness:

Brace us to play the man!

Again it becomes more leisurely, with a meditative brooding, as in the prayer by Francis G. Peabody, which begins:

Abide with us, O searching and chastening Spirit of the living God, for it is evening and the day is far spent.

However varied, the rhythms of public prayer should possess the prayerful quality themselves. They will do so according to the measure in which we who make them have transmuted experience and thought by the poetic alchemy of word, image, and rhythm into the pure gold of living speech.

An admirable illustration of the poetic touch in prayer is the familiar collect with which we close this chapter. In it rhythm, images and words conspire to breathe poetic life into the human need, hope, and thought of God which the prayer embodies. Here is that blend of creative artistry and religious purpose for which our prayers have been waiting:

Lighten our darkness, we beseech Thee, O Lord;
and by Thy great mercy defend us from all perils
and dangers of this night; for the love of Thy Son,
our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

CHAPTER SIX

Prayer as Poetry: Themes, Moods, and Movements

IN THE last chapter we found in the technical details of poetry, suggestions for the making of prayers. The larger features of poetry also offer us important hints. We therefore turn now to reflect on the ways in which the themes, moods, and movements of poetry shed light upon our task.

First, as to its themes. A theme is to the poet what it is to the composer of music: the organizing principle of his subject matter. An appreciative study of the symphonies of Mozart, Beethoven, or Brahms reveals that certain basic figures of melody are placed prominently in the score so that the rest of the music is related to them either by repeating them in varied ways or developing them in further directions. These basic figures serve as themes, organizing the whole composition into recognizable and effective patterns of musical sound.

Similarly, poetry depends for much of its felt effectiveness upon the choice and use of basic themes. The theme becomes easily apparent when refrains are used, as in the forty-second and forty-third

psalms, where the phrase, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" introduces a thrice-repeated theme. More frequently the poetic theme is implied rather than stated. It may be simply a thought in the poet's mind rather than a phrase in his work. Such themes both divide and unite a poem. They break it up into artistic units and bind it into artistic wholeness. They achieve what art critics call "unity-in-variety."

Some poetic themes are perennial. There is the transiency of love and happiness which sounds an eternal note of sadness in sonnets and lyrics by ancients and moderns, evoked by the stark inevitability of death. "Gather ye rosebuds while ye may," write poets moved by this theme, for "Time's wingèd chariot" is "hurrying near." There is that throbbing immediacy of ecstasy, sensual or religious, which is a bright flame extinguished brutally by the onrushing passage of life. There is nostalgia for nature, felt by those who live in tight city rooms and sung by poets from Theocritus to Robert Frost. And there is that counterpoise of grim unbelief and wistful yearning made luminous by poets of intellectual sophistication like Virgil or A. E. Housman; and a host of other themes which have, time and again, urged the poet into speech.

Prayer also appropriates and responds to themes as the organizing principles of its subject matter. The themes of destiny and freedom, change and permanence, good and evil, the individual and society, life and death, are inexhaustible resources of religious power and eloquence. Hebrew prophecy and poetry

play ceaseless variations on them. The Christian liturgies, East and West, re-state them in collect, litany and response. The hymns we sing echo them:

O Thou who changest not, abide with me.
Center and soul of every sphere,
Yet to each loving heart how near!

These are only some of the themes available for public prayer. Other lists may be found in W. L. Sperry's *Reality in Worship*; E. S. Brightman's *Religious Values*; and Von Ogden Vogt's *Modern Worship*. It is noteworthy that these themes come most often as sets of thought-contrasts, a fact which has more than passing meaning. For it is what we have termed the dynamic contrast between God and man that calls forth and guides the development of a prayer's theme. Whatever theme be chosen, let it be a variation on the noblest theme of all: man and God—lovingly together yet awfully apart. Then the themes of prayer will express in word, image and rhythm the endless thrusting of our spirits after God, the steady confronting of us by Him, the patient influence working in us, among us and about us, which is God.

Our choice of themes for prayer is made easier if we bear in mind three important standards. The first is universality. Does the prayer express a recurrent longing, an inexhaustible idea, or a deathless hope? Does it bind the worshipers into the age-old pilgrimage of the human heart? Does it hold firmly and affectionately to the past while lighting the path

toward the future? If it is universal in these psychological, social, and temporal ways the theme has genuine greatness for prayer.

Another standard is poignancy. Does the theme pierce sharply yet tenderly home? Bernard of Clairvaux said: "God hears not the words of one who prays, unless he that prays first hears them himself." Is the theme, then, probing to the conscience, livening to the imagination, fuel for the fires of the mind? Is it real to him who speaks it and those for whom it is spoken? Whether it be grateful or anguished, glad or bitter, if it has this quality it is richly suited to public prayer.

Objectivity is the third standard. Does the theme take us up and out of ourselves, make us self-critical, self-judging? Does it focus our loyalties and center our energies? Does it preserve us from morbid self-pity and enervating sentimentality? If it meets all three of these standards the prayerful theme takes its place beside the enduring ones of poetry and music.

How, once chosen, may the theme be developed? The simplest method is to enunciate it at the beginning, develop it organically by means of variations which either expand its original meaning or break it down into more vivid parts, and finally reaffirm it at the close. More will be said about this method under the subject of movement. Frequently several themes may be employed in the same prayer, provided they grow naturally out of each other. But for the sake of clarity and compactness the usual rule is to choose for each prayer one theme which is uni-

versal, poignant, and objective enough to permit of a many-sided treatment.

As themes give our prayers objective structure, so moods give them subjective intensity. A prayer, like a poem, is concerned to build and uphold a mood or series of moods. Let us look at poetry first. When William Ernest Henley writes:

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole . . .

we know that a mood of grim deliberate courage is brought into being. And when Thomas Campion sings:

To music bent is my retirèd mind,
And fain would I some song of pleasure sing . . .

we are at once quieted and composed for the mood of musical serenity called up by the words. Mood is the least tangible but the most experienced part of a poem. One cannot argue about or analyze it; one can only feel it.

Prayer has its moods too. Though not of such wide variety as those of poetry they serve the same purpose. More than anything else they make the prayer, like the poem, a felt experience.

What we have just said must not be construed to mean that a public prayer is offered to the worshipers rather than to God. A hearer once remarked that a prayer of Phillips Brooks was the best ever delivered to a Boston audience! That is to confuse in a thor-

oughly mischievous way the functions of sermon and prayer. A public prayer is offered for the people, not to them. Yet the condition of its being really for them is fulfilled only if the prayer can bring them to the moods of fellowship and worship from which true prayer comes. Though a pastoral prayer should never descend to the theatrical level, it must rise to the dramatic level, in which the worshipers participate corporately and personally in the worshipful experience. Mood in prayer is the means by which this goal is most surely and sensitively achieved.

The moods of prayer are those of the religious life itself. The pastoral prayer is a concentrated miniature of religious living, in which the moods appropriate to that living are evinced among the worshipers and gathered into the psychological pattern of worship. These moods are not straitjackets into which the prayer must be forced. Many attempts to construct prayers purely on the basis of some psychological progression of moods, following the model of Isaiah, the mystic way, or a modern textbook in the psychology of religion, suggest the sort of regimentation to which we have paid our respects in the first chapter. The moods of prayer are rather incentives from which it springs. They afford prayer the gem of sincerity—of self-disclosure and self-commitment, which is embedded in the matrix of dynamic contrast.

A prayer may be all in one mood; more normally it follows through several moods, related to each other by the inner logic of the religious life. It must

not do so mechanically, but to be religiously complete and satisfying it strikes most, if not all, of the moods suggested below. Let us imagine an ideal series of moods for the pastoral prayer, remembering that often a single word or phrase may create a mood serving as a psychological bridge between others more important to that particular prayer's theme and purpose.

Since it is addressed nominally, and one hopes really, to God, a prayer naturally begins in a mood of adoration. This has two complementary parts, invocation and specification. We invoke the presence of ultimate Good, the Good whose far-flung reach and power make any touch of vulgar familiarity or patronizing compliment impossible. It is a mood that stretches mind and imagination to their uttermost, outermost ranges. Winds of destiny blow through it; dazzling heights and boundless depths of being come into view.

Since the very first words of prayer gather the worshipers into this mood, they must therefore be large, expansive ones. One who begins a prayer with "Dear God," except in the presence of little children, has lost this sense of immensity in which adoration properly arises. It is better to begin with the simple "O Thou," which fosters the sense of a Mystery whose dimensions tower far above and beyond the frontiers of life. Invocation, the calling upon God, should simply and beautifully bring Him to mind; and it must be God, rather than an idea or feeling of men about God, who is addressed.

Specification, the second part of adoration, characterizes that aspect of God which the prayer has most at heart—his greatness, glory, or surpassing goodness. The words of invocation merge almost imperceptibly with those of specification. After the whole scope and strength of God have been brought to mind, the facet of His many-sided reality which answers the need in question is held in focus. There is a kind of inevitable firstness about adoration in the moods of prayer. It has to come to the fore of consciousness in advance of our specific and urgent needs because it is only in the light of the worshipful Reality that we see ourselves as standing in the need of prayer.

Adoration cannot be long sustained before another mood naturally emerges. The vision of Isaiah in the temple is the classic illustration of this. The worshiper who hears the cry, "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts" very soon is aware of himself: "Woe is me, for I am undone." In the presence of the supremely worthy he deems himself utterly unworthy. This is the mood of confession.

Confession also has two levels. First comes acknowledgment of unworthiness and therefore of need. Thomas à Kempis said that in it we confess against ourselves our own unrighteousness. For a time we become our severest critics. It is not need in general (as if there were any such thing!) but *our* need of which we are critically aware, whether it be for companionship or strength or meaningful direction. The mood thus established we may call humility.

Consciousness of need is not enough. It leads inevitably to the sincere sorrow and repentance which the medieval thinkers called "contrition," distinguishing it carefully from "attrition," which is a state of mind induced by fear of punishment. Another of their distinctions may help us here, that between sins of omission and sins of commission. Our model may well be the words of the General Confession in the Book of Common Prayer:

We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; and we have done those things which we ought not to have done.

We may, of course, employ many fresh and creative expressions of the same twofold repentance. A mere enumeration of failings and wrongs does not suffice. Keen recognition of a single need is better than hurried listing of many. The sharper the cutting edge and the more inclusive the meaning of the words of confession, the more surely the prayer prepares the humble and the contrite heart for the moods to follow.

Thus far the prayer has, so to speak, set the stage for the crucial mood of petition. This concerns our asking God for those things we cannot control or bring to pass by our own efforts. It fuses adoration and confession, the two psychological poles of the dynamic contrast, in the eagerness proper to itself. The moment of petition is the eager flame of prayer; it is the urgent beating of prayer's wings against the sins that do so easily beset us.

Eagerness, the response proper to petition, is compounded of anxiety and expectancy. Here the worshiper, knowing both his own unworthiness and that Best beyond him greater than his best, seeks to make God's goodness in some measure his own. His anxiety that the dark tangled places of his life should be lighted by the ways of God, that he may somehow appropriate God's favor to himself, is tempered by the waiting, wondering expectancy of a creaturely dependence. It is the twofold mood of Second Isaiah, of the Advent season: it says with the stringent urgency of Milton:

. . . what in me is dark
Illumine, what is low raise and support.

even while waiting patiently on the Lord.

When petition is made most deeply and feelingly it moves on to intercession. This is the making of petitions for others. If, as the Christian believes, personality is essentially a "capacity for communion," the man who prays will seek in his prayer to pull more firmly together the strands that bind him to his fellows far and near, seen and unseen. The mystery of love is that it can extend its arms to those it cannot see. The mysterious power of noble pastoral prayer is that it can make imaginatively real to the visible group at worship those whom having not seen, we love. This, again, is chiefly a poetic task. It means the concrete picturing of those in need, whoever or wherever they may be, that the single person may enter with love and longing into the lives of others.

Intercession smooths the rough edges of Christian sympathy, corrects its nearsightedness, expands its range of vision, breaks down its walls of smugness. These are its advantages. Its peril lies in a frequent confusion of sympathy with pity. Reinhold Niebuhr has told us that pity may often be "a form of contempt under a thin disguise of sympathy."¹ This attitude has no place in intercessory prayer. Let there be no superiority, no condescension, in it, but rather creatureliness before God. If it have not love based on fellow-feeling, the prayer of intercession is sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. Yet when all is said, intercession remains an open door for the outward flow of generous sympathy, the mood belonging to it.

Thanksgiving normally follows petition as a mood of religious living. Hence the liturgical prayer-makers, with sure psychological insight, placed gratitude for needs already met beside asking for things as yet unwon. We have seen in an earlier chapter how gratitude is a sure incentive of prayer. To call that mood into being is a task for the full poetic art. One may be helped by such poems as Rupert Brooke's *The Great Lover*, with its skilled, sensitive recording of things remembered with gladness:

White plates and cups, clean—gleaming,
Ringed with blue lines . . .
Rainbows; and the blue bitter smoke of wood;
And radiant raindrops couching in cool flowers . . .²

¹ From *Does Civilization Need Religion?* by Reinhold Niebuhr. Quoted by permission of the publishers, The Macmillan Company.

² From *The Collected Poems of Rupert Brooke*, quoted by permission of the publishers, McClelland & Stewart Ltd.

The simpler joys of sensuous feel and lovely sight, no less than the more profound thanksgivings, may "shake the soul and let the glory out."

The danger here is that thanksgiving may become petty and trivial. Who has not suffered under those makers of prayer who thank God for everything from new hymn books to an increase in the junior department, shutting their eyes—and ours—to the profounder glories of azure sky, snow-crowned peaks, amber waves of grain, or billowing sea with which Heaven besieges the human heart? The poets may help us here, more than at other times, if we but listen. By doing so we enhance and foster in the spirit a sense of glad surprise, that we may sing a new song of "the wonders of His love."

The mood of gratitude, induced by thanksgiving, moves on to that of dependence signalized by the ascription. Here the prayer leaves the matter with God. "For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory" is prayer's way of saying that after awakening to inmost need and utmost Good in dynamic contrast, we place ourselves hopefully and in faith before the throne of grace. The most hallowed instance for Christendom of this mood is Jesus' "Not my will but Thine be done."

Frequently the ascription not only refers the matter to God but states the medium through which the prayer is offered. The words "through Jesus Christ our Lord" or "in Jesus' name" do just this. Many times it is preferable to use the form "in the spirit of Him whose name we bear" in order that the ascrip-

tion may have more than habitual and routine meaning.

The prayer ends with "Amen," whose literal force is "so be it." This carries forward the mood of dependence and brings the prayer around to where it started. It is an integral part of the prayer. It should, therefore, not be casually and thoughtlessly said, but spoken with the assurance and finality which the mood requires.

There is a marvelous movement of moods in a worthy pastoral prayer. Proceeding from an inner logic of thought and feeling it marches from adoration and enthrallment to humility, then grows eager with anxious expectancy, expands into sympathy and gratitude, finally reinvoking the presence of God and bringing the movement to a full cycle of religious experience.

This leads us to a last comparison between poetry and prayer. A poem which has life moves, and so moves its hearers. Its theme awakens responsive moods which carry it forward with a fine necessity. An incoherent poem jolts and puzzles us; a poorly constructed prayer has rough, unjointed edges that grate against the worshiping imagination. Movement in prayer thus becomes religiously important.

Such movement must never be random, but neither should it be tight and stylized. It should, however, possess a definite structure. The simplest is circular; in this type the chosen theme acts as the logical and psychological center about which the prayer is or-

ganized. The closing sentence joins the meaning of the opening one. A splendid example of this is the General Thanksgiving in the Book of Common Prayer, beginning with the dignified, clear statement of the invocation and moving directly into the confession: "Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we Thine unworthy servants . . ."

The prayers included in Chapter Nine of this book have for the most part this kind of movement, which possesses the double advantage of clear structure for the praying group and good practice for its leader. Circular movement is also a definite evidence of artistic form.

Within this general circular movement the pastoral prayer may employ at least two subordinate kinds of movement. One is linear, in which the development proceeds straightway from the statement of a theme to a logical working-out of the thought. The prayers for Good Friday and the New Year given in Chapter Nine of this book illustrate this type. Its use enables us to keep to the main road, preventing fumbling repetitions and tempting bypaths.

A second subsidiary movement, also learned from poetry, is dialectical. This means a balance between alternating or contrasting themes. If God is invoked as changeless, inevitably the changeableness of human living comes to mind. If justice is affirmed of Him, the natural counterweight is man's injustice to his fellow man. This builds up a rhythmic dialectic which may be developed by restating the original contrast

in sharper and more detailed imagery. The prayer for evening in our final chapter indicates this kind of movement.

Any of these movements, or all three together, should give a prayer artistic life and religious worth and be true to the general principle of dynamic contrast. If employed with poetic skill and prayerful integrity they should endow our public prayers with the beauty of holiness.

We have seen how poetry may illumine our making of prayers. In leaving this subject, what most of all needs to be said? Is it not that poetry, more than any other way of life, is the sensitive instrument for interpreting God to man and man to himself? The prophets and mystics have found it so. Its exalted yet simple speech, its sharp yet spacious imagery, its brooding rhythms, its timeless themes and perennial moods, its sureness of movement, all may bestow upon our prayers the dignity, humaneness, and imaginativeness they sorely need. They bring us, in the midst of the fever and dreary intercourse of daily life, "repose and hope amid eternal things."

CHAPTER SEVEN

A Bookshelf of Prayer

IF THE prayer-maker is to take advantage of the benefits bestowed by poetry upon his task, he must naturally be a sensitive, devouring reader. As every poet has his sources, every minister and leader of worship will have his. Each of us has his private fountain of many blessings from which he freely drinks to refresh his own spirits and those of other people. We shall speak in this chapter only of the more shareable Christian materials.

There are three main kinds of such material available for the leader of worship. There is Biblical literature, which in a real sense is the pit from which we all are digged. There is the large and far from barren field of liturgical material, which Protestants of the non-liturgical sort are making more and more their own. Finally there is the realm of general literature, sacred and profane (if we can still separate them!), providing us with innumerable vicarious yet vivid and touching experiences. All these may enrich our prayers by the varied substance and spirit of the human heart.

We have spoken of the Bible as a source of poetic insight. How many of us have considered the Bible

as a source-book of prayers? We have taken over some of its phrases, but have we treasured so dearly its meanings? We have made pious capital of its forms, but have we broken the seal of custom and unwrapped its spiritual substance? The Bible is not only a textbook to be consulted hurriedly when one needs a fine phrase or a compelling thought. It is a source-book, to be lived with and made a part of one's very thinking and feeling. It is a bedrock of Christian prayer.

Consider in the first place how rich the Bible is in model prayers. A majority of the Psalms are prayers, and public prayers at that, ranging through all the moods and themes about which we have spoken. Though mostly offered in the first person, the universality, poignancy, and objectivity of their themes, as well as the sharply-etched and stirring detail of their moods and rhythms, make them suitable for public worship, as they actually were employed by the Temple throngs. Here are the prayer-hymns of a singing religion, rendered with antiphon and dance, accompanied by the timbrel and lyre. Here, too, are prayers of comfort for heavy hearts; prayers of inner victory in the midst of outward defeat; prayers of grateful praise and deepened fellow-feeling. What a host of prayers with re-creative, stimulating power!

Outside the Psalter is an equally profuse multitude of riches. Prayers said by the patriarchs, by storied leaders of the Hebrew people, judges, kings, and prophets, are scattered abundantly over its pages. Whether uttered in the crisis of personal desolation

or amid the pageantry of public festivals they strike and re-echo the authentic notes of prayer. And the prayers of the New Testament, emerging from newly-found hope and purpose, reinforce and magnificently enlarge the Bible's usefulness for making prayers.

To study the Bible merely as a book of sermon-texts or character-building stories is to miss the pulse-beats of its heart. It is a book of prayer; and our prayers are far better for being steeped in Biblical sources. Going to the Bible with standards for prayer-making in mind reveals undreamed-of stimuli and counsel in it. It lengthens our contemporary perspective into the larger vision of a fellowship and heritage that make us what we are and place us where we stand.

The Bible's usefulness is not exhausted in a study of its explicit prayers. In two general ways it yields rich source-material for our prayers. It affords us ideas of the God who hears prayer and an estimate of men at their best and worst who pray.

In an earlier chapter we discussed the question: Is the God we need in prayer the sort of God in whom we can believe? We said that the very act of prayer, as well as its words, assumes a Reality at once good and loving which responds to men. The Bible takes us out of the realm of argument and assumption into that of concrete faith. Here is no minimum idea of God but the flesh and blood, the full articulation, of our highest and deepest thoughts. Not a skeleton of thought but a living Will confronts us.

We shall not put down our tools of reason and ob-

servation when we come to the Bible. We shall find, however, a store of names for God and picturings of His ways with men which generously supplements the bloodless abstractions of our own lean thoughts.

There is an abundance of these in the eighth-century prophets alone which outlasts a lifetime of public prayers. Amos' thought of God as supremely just and demanding justice among men, a God who flings fire and sends shattering earthquakes upon his stubborn, unyielding folk, who is like a bear running after a man, or a snake in the wall against which the unrighteous man cowers—these tremendous pictures are forever powerful in prayers of social concern and human rights. Hosea's gentler images of Him, as the alluring One who brings back his faithless folk in loving kindness and mercy to Himself, as One who binds up a people's wounds and comes as surely as the dawn, as quietly, persuasively as the spring rain—these are pregnant with meaning for those in any age, and surely to all of us who like sheep have gone astray. The High and Holy One, whose voice Isaiah heard in the Temple, in whose sight all flesh is as grass, yet whose glory fills the whole earth, is both a most elemental and a most superb image for the Determiner of man's destiny.

We recall other pictures of God. Ezekiel's portrait of Him as the Good Shepherd; Jeremiah's naming Him as Father, who weeps in secret for man's pride and grows tired of relenting in the face of man's repeated rejection; Second Isaiah's marvelous togetherness of transcendent majesty and immanent compas-

sion in the figure of the Maker of heaven and earth whose deliverance and comfort know no bounds—these replenish constantly, as sublime religious ideas do, our dwindling stock of names and images for God. The parables of Jesus, already mentioned, abound with nourishing pictures which may dispel that hungry look our prayers so often wear. In these places and in many others, we find our way back to the dynamic contrast which is prayer's true environment, and in doing so we may cause our fellow-worshipers to think thoughts "with God ablaze."

The Bible also shows us what is in man. It is not so much a connected rational account as it is a series of vivid insights. At one point the Psalmist sings of man confidently as "a little lower than the angels"; at another, Paul cries: "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" The Bible's thoughts of man were born and matured in agony and triumph, shod with the sandals of hope and bent with the burden of pain, all of which are life itself.

There is a deep-rooted paradox in the account of man we find in the Bible—and a strangely constant one. On the one hand, we feel a profound pessimism about man as he is; on the other, a great and yearning hope for man as he may become. It reaches its climax in the thought of Paul; and here we must come for the heart of the Christian estimate. In the Christian view, man is a creature who needs strength, companionship, and wisdom which only God can furnish. There are depths in him not only of weakness but of demonic lusts and hates. There are heights in him

of desire and vision which "it somehow takes God to account for." All in all, man is one who stands in the need of prayer; and the Biblical pictures of him, whether a lonely nomad shaken by God's presence, a mighty monarch cringing before His rebuke, or a steadfast follower enduring stripes and shipwreck, jail and stonings for His sake, may show us and those we lead in prayer what it means to be human.

The hundreds of character-portraits in the Bible bring home this same truth. Even those of its mighty ones who were nearest to God felt the chill of alienation from Him: Moses striking out in anger at the rock, Elijah hiding, mortally afraid, in the cave, Jesus in the garden called Gethsemane. The story of Jonah is one of the most human of Old Testament books. Its grotesque features have long been disputed, but its real point is too often ignored. A man is trying to run away from God and finding that it cannot be done. If we read the Bible for hints about man, we shall find much we might otherwise miss. For significant statements of the Christian view of man and for abundant sketches of him in varied capacities and circumstances, but always in account with God, the Bible is the primary and indispensable source. What Coleridge said about it each of us knows to be true; it finds us where we live.

Then there is a large field of liturgical material. The older liturgies, the Orthodox, Lutheran and Reformed, are not easily procured, though portions of each are given in *Venite Adoremus*, the two-volume service book of the World's Student Christian Feder-

ation. This collection will assume increasing importance as the ecumenical movement grows. John W. Suter's recently published *Book of English Collects* is also helpful. There is no reason why we should not appropriate to ourselves something of the singing beauty and profuse symbolism of the churches of the East, the quiet dignity of Anglican matins and even-song, or the austere Biblical service of the Reformed faith. Even more accessible is *The Book of Common Prayer*. As with other liturgical collections, one does not need to lift specific prayers out of it so much as enter into its rhythmic, lucid, and stately speech by spending many hours with it. It is helpful to take one of the prayers as a model and construct variations on it. Why not write one's own prayer for the marriage service, or a General Confession with the sins of a business-minded and property-dominated civilization at heart?

There is much of value, too, in the denominational orders of worship other than our own, not excepting the Roman Catholic Missal. Let us hope that we have emerged from the adolescent period of American Protestantism when we avoided taints of Popery like the plague, re-tailored great hymns to the fashions of the times, and insulated ourselves from the influence of other traditions than our own. We have a great deal to learn, and the older services can teach us as no uprooted experimenting can, for they are crystallizations of a devotional experience and wisdom which no individual can afford to set aside. A word must also be said for a good hymn-book. Its

inclusion on the minister's bookshelf brings many a phrase or thought to mind, and invigorates his prayers with the singing strength of the dignified and devotional hymns of the church. The prayers printed at the end of this volume exhibit this influence.

There are also numerous manuals and collections of public prayers. These are both directly and indirectly useful. Some are arranged calendar-wise, which, like the similar and equally perilous arrangements of ready-made sermons, tends to create a habit of excessive, slavish dependence upon them. Others are put together topically, which is better. In using them, however, one is apt to pull out something labelled "faith," "the inner life," or "social relations," which has merely a verbal connection with what he wants to say in his own prayer. Joseph Fort Newton's *Altar Stairs* or Morgan Park Noyes' *Prayers for Services* are two of the best. We are put more on our mettle by having to dig for source material in collections which have not been already prepared for us. A wisely edited collection or manual stimulates rather than hinders the creative use of its materials. What we have to learn from these collections is not only specific phrases or forms but a fine liturgical feeling and ways of working with prayerful materials in order to observe our principles of effectiveness.

Volumes of prayers by single persons are to be commended. Francis G. Peabody, Walter Rauschenbusch, Robert Louis Stevenson, Henry Ward Beecher, Samuel Johnson, Jeremy Taylor and others back to Augustine, Basil, and Chrysostom have

spoken within the Christian tradition a prayer-language of richness and power. On occasion these prayers may be used as they were written, with the reader's interpretative ability assuming paramount importance. Or it may be that a phrase is learned, an image lifted out, a rhythm appropriated; in this case the leader's skill in working them into the structure of his own prayer tells the artistic story. Whichever use we make of them, our prayers must be honestly our own. Even though we speak with the words of another we must speak in sincerity and in truth.

Before we leave this subject it is well to mention several collections of prayers especially suited to youthful congregations, for these are the groups our prayers fail most often to touch. Walter Russell Bowie's *Lift Up Your Hearts* is a noteworthy group of poetically sensitive prayers. J. S. Hoyland's *A Book of Prayers for Youth* is another. George Stewart's *A Face to the Sky* has also proved serviceable.

A wide acquaintance with such liturgical and personal collections enlarges our insights and sharpens our methods. Occasionally we may even find just the word we have been looking for outside the Christian tradition. The Jewish liturgy with its fine blend of prophetic zeal and priestly dedication has much to offer. A book like Robert Ernest Hume's *Treasure House of the World's Religions* gives us some of the most valuable passages in readable and inexpensive form. If we mean it when we say that God is one, we may sincerely make use of prayers and prayerful

passages from these other faiths. For example, there is the simple, sublime prayer in Plato's *Phaedrus*:

Beloved Pan, and all ye other gods who here abide, grant me to be beautiful in the inner man, and all I have of outer goods to be at peace with those within. May I count the wise man only rich, and may my store of gold be such as none but the good can bear.

Plato, you remember, has Socrates say when he has finished: "Phaedrus, need we anything more? For myself I have prayed enough." Phaedrus answers: "For me too pray the same. Friends share and share alike." A potent source of understanding between our varied faiths lies in the fact that we can share and share alike in their common fund of prayerful literature.

Another reservoir of source material for prayers is general literature. There is, first of all, and directly suited to our purpose, the literature of devotion. The maker of prayer usually reads in it for his own and not his prayers' sake; but let him be sure to read it, widely and repeatedly, for its benefits do not reach the hasty, haphazard reader.

Thomas à Kempis' *Imitation of Christ*, the *Little Flowers* of Francis of Assisi, Augustine's *Confessions*, and the diaries and memoirs of many a mystic suggest the range and penetration of the Catholic piety of the "interior life." Martin Luther's *Table Talk* (especially the section on prayer); William Law's *Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*;

Jeremy Taylor's *Holy Living and Holy Dying* (especially for its prayers, written in a mood of deep evangelical, personal penitence); George Fox's *Journal*; and John Bunyan's *The Spirit of Prayer*, written in the year of his imprisonment in Bedford jail (somewhat marred by its anti-Prayer Book animus)—all of these speak with a firm and devoted Protestant voice. Their language may seem quaint to us, but these old books have a piquancy which our own prayers need.

Near these books, or some of them, on the minister's work table should be a copy of *The Oxford Book of Mystical Verse* or some other first-class collection of religious poetry. He will soon learn, if he has not already done so, the difference between genuine religious poetry and versified moralizing and sentimental nonsense, which latter make up a shocking part of modern collections. He will also distinguish between faddish and permanent materials of this kind, knowing that the time-tested poets are almost always the safest to use. John Donne, George Herbert, Henry Vaughan, are rich in themes and moods of prayer. Possibly William Blake, Coventry Patmore and Gerard Manley Hopkins may be directly or indirectly useful. And the titanic spirits from whom poets like these drew their strength, Dante and Spenser and Milton, will also challenge us.

If, however, one would know the full force of modern bitterness, glory or longing let him read the poets of his own day. As Amos N. Wilder has shown us in his helpful volume, *The Spiritual Aspects of the*

New Poetry, contemporary poetry mirrors the anguish and the dream of its age; even its pessimism and disillusion are portents of hopes unrealized or visions clouded. In the early work of T. S. Eliot is a surgeon-like analysis of modern man in search of his soul, a search now ludicrous and silly, again ennobling and awesome. The later Eliot speaks more directly to our vocation in poems of religious affirmation and churchly loyalty. Turning to writers like E. A. Robinson or Thomas Hardy, we are bowed low with the sense of emptiness and fate pressing in upon men's living. When we read the formally perfect sonnets of Edna St. Vincent Millay we catch beneath their polished cynical surfaces the heartache of a little child. These are all echoes, magnified by art, of the inner voices of the folk who come into our churches to pray. Not infrequently they describe us to ourselves, to whom our people look in trusting hope.

Occasionally poetry of religious character may be read directly. Reinhold Niebuhr once used John Donne's *Hymn to God the Father* as a pastoral prayer in the chapel of the University of Chicago, and hearing it was an unforgettably rich experience. One is constantly surprised by the many prayers in poetic form, both new and old. By way of example, there is A. E. Housman's "Easter Hymn," as powerful a poetic prayer as one may find, or Louis Untermeyer's "Caliban in the Coal Mines," whose earnest simplicity has genuine religious power.

More important than direct use is the indirect effect of all poetry upon our style and sensitivity. To

repeat the comment of an earlier chapter, poetry enlarges, particularizes, and humanizes the religious life. Why should a prayer not possess at least as much heart-touching appeal as a popular song or a cherished poem? Whether we use poetry directly or allow it to shape our speech indirectly it gives our prayers the warmth and vigor they need.

Another source, mostly indirect, is provided by drama, novels and biographies. Literature and the theater have been quick to furnish to religion the color and poignancy our churches have largely lost. The recent publication and reception of a notable series of books with religious themes indicate not only a failure on the part of Christian leaders to make our heritage come alive but where we may turn to recapture much of its lost radiance.

Pageantry like that in Masefield's *The Coming of Christ* or Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* does just this. Without losing its hold on contemporary realities it places them against the scenery of our churchly inheritance and upon the stage of man's age-long quest for salvation. Our prayers may profit from this example. They should interpret needs and goals in the searching light of Christian tradition and likewise focus that light at the point of contemporary perplexity and expectation.

Novels, too, provide a vicarious enlargement and enhancement of life. In ways infrequently clear to the reader himself, they stimulate interest and sympathy toward new or foreign values, persons and behavior. Let the reader not confine himself to the Victorian

moralists or the writers of sentimental piety but plunge into the novels that show us the seamy and crusty sides of human nature. Respectability and decorum hide rather than lay bare the flesh we mortals are heir to; *Moby Dick* and *Tom Jones* have more to give us as interpreters of men to themselves and to God than the writings of Warwick Deeping or Lloyd C. Douglas. Novels like Richard Wright's *Native Son*, John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* and Ernest Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, for all their profaneness, possess insight into the strange creature, man, which far exceeds that of more decorous writers.

Biographies written with sympathetic scholarship may lend telling aid. Every one has his own heroes of the spiritual life. Its Dantes, Francises and Kagawas are often inspirers of the prayerful imagination; but what of the Listers and Madame Curies, the Galileos and the Michelangelos? They, too, may prompt and fortify the spirit's search which prayer celebrates.

The literature of the imagination is not the only literary source of good prayers. If, as we maintain, the widest possible human fellowship is a goal of prayer, then we who make prayers must know what the barriers to that ideal are and how they may be overcome. Literature of social and psychological problems, of racial tensions, economic pressures and political movements, will be genuinely if indirectly helpful. When their findings and insights are filtered through the humane imagination into Christian prayer, they make concrete and pungent what might

otherwise be merely a vague benevolence. They give an almost muscular energy to a sympathy otherwise helpless to change things.

It is clear that literature, whether of the imagination or of problems, is no substitute for life. There is such a thing as overindulgence in both. Baron von Hügel once wrote: "The decisive preparation for prayer lies not in itself but in the life prior to the prayer."¹ Prayers are made out of life as well as out of literature. Now and again pastoral calls yield the substance out of which prayers are made; the minister's own prayers, as graphic spiritual reports to God on the state of need and achievement among his parishioners, store up a reservoir of intercession for public, common use. Remembering this, and employing to the full the resources of literature sacred and profane, imaginative and problematic, which come our way, we shall make better public prayers.

Some readers, knowing how occupied is the minister's day with other engagements, doubtless wonder whether such an ambitious program of reading as is outlined here may be adopted. The answer to this practical problem is that a daily reading period, even of only half an hour, spent in religious and secular literature, is worth giving up some other things now regarded as more important. Such a daily regimen, whether it be a time set carefully aside or a means of filling in the small gaps between appointments, is an

¹ From *Essays and Addresses, Second Series*, by Friedrich von Hügel. Quoted by permission of the publishers, E. P. Dutton & Co.

invaluable discipline and a stimulant to personal growth.

We close this chapter on the bookshelf of source-materials for prayer with a cautioning word. The minister makes the most telling and lasting use of his materials when he reads them with no ulterior motive in mind. There is a "Jack-Horner" way of using works of poetry and devotion and human interest which misses the point of their permanent value. Rather than reading simply to extract a "plum" for his public utterance, the minister should read for enjoyment, for knowledge, for sympathetic enlargement of vision. Let him seek to become the full man whom Bacon said was the product of reading. Then all these other things—turns of phrase, word-pictures, new ideas—shall be added unto him.

John Bunyan described prayer as "a sincere, sensible, affectionate pouring out of the heart or soul to God." This is but to emphasize what we have already insisted upon—that when a man prays, his own sincerity tells the final story. Whatever has been said about using materials, as well as about poetic skill or thoughtful clarity, assumes a penetrating personal sincerity in the one who prays. Without it, all else avails little. With it, prayer rings true, giving forth no uncertain sounds but unmistakable tones like deep calling unto deep.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Root and Flower of Prayer

PUBLIC prayer is like marriage. It is not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly and in the fear of God. We have come now to the place where, with the principles of effective prayer in his mind, a touch of poetry in his heart, and his source-materials ready at hand, the leader of worship is ready to enter into the privilege and duty of his holy estate.

That prayer is a holy estate does not, as we have seen, imply that there is no craftsmanship about it. On the contrary, this chapter is devoted to suggestions regarding the craftsmanship of public prayer, its preparation and delivery. Though these two aspects of the task may be conveniently distinguished, they cannot be separated from each other in reality. No amount of sonorous impressiveness in delivery can disguise a ragged or shoddy preparation. Conversely, all one's efforts in careful preparation are cancelled out by a slipshod or perfunctory delivery.

Prayer in the making is a continuous process, extending from the first moments of preparation through the final moment of delivery. Its parts are interdependent. He who is successful in it carries

through all its stages his allegiance to the standards of effective public prayer which we have thus far pondered.

Preparation is in large measure a pastoral task. The minister is seated in his study with tomorrow's prayer uppermost in his mind. Other matters, too, are near to his concern. He has just come from his weekly visit to an incurable patient, lying bed-ridden, as she has for years, in a lonely upstairs room. Her husband and children will be at church in the morning. How shall he pray for them, and for her?

Just yesterday he spent an hour with an outwardly prosperous executive who recently lost his wife in a tragic accident. At first stunned by the blow, the businessman has now grown angry with God for depriving him of the only person he ever really loved. How, in the morning, can the minister in his prayer heal the wound of this man's bitterness with words of comfort and hope?

Earlier in the week the minister called upon a widow and her daughter who work long hours at a miserable wage in their gallant effort to keep body and soul together. Their church is all that weighs against a drab and gruelling life, and they are among his most faithful parishioners. How, on the morrow, shall the minister by words of prayer add to their lives the color and dimension they need?

Last night the minister and his wife had supper with the church's wealthiest family. They saw, as never before, how the placid smugness of their lives hides in reality a multitude of conflicts and jealousies

over little things, and how the false gods of possession and prestige lead astray their efforts after the Christian life. They take the church for granted as an opportunity for exerting power and distributing favors. How may the words of prayer speak to their condition, lifting them persuasively, irresistibly, out of their spiritual dullness and pride into freshened devotion and broadened vision?

This is the human environment of pastoral prayer. It is this surrounding matrix of human situations that *makes* a prayer pastoral. In preparing his prayer the minister becomes an analyst of human need, seeking by the words he uses to say for his people what they would not or could not say for themselves. He shepherds them into a mood that binds together the strands of broken and distracted living into wholeness of concern and allegiance. He knows that his prayer, if it is to avoid the fate of a pious irrelevance, must speak their unspoken yearnings on the morrow. He knows, too, that he must be continually sensitive and flexible, as their pastor, to the shocks and changes of their lives if he is to speak for them to God.

There are occasions, too, when newspaper headlines strike a common note of fear or sympathy in the hearts of all. The minister does not construct his prayer so rigidly in advance that he cannot take intuitive advantage of these precious moments of strong and cohesive feeling. His preparation is flexible enough to make way for the prayerful recognition and treatment of such unforeseen emergencies.

Frequently the minister is asked to offer prayer at some large public meeting, only semi-religious in purpose. It may be too much to expect him to become temporarily the pastor of the gathered assemblage and to endow the meeting with full religious significance. It is not too much to ask, however, that he should prepare his prayer with just that occasion in mind and say something in prayer which makes effective contact with those who have come together.

Though he can seldom know as much as he should about the people who attend such a meeting, he can certainly become acquainted in advance with its physical environment. Prayer of this sort necessarily falls short of the pastoral ideal, but it may at least be competently prepared and offered with dignity. Frequently the leader does not reckon with the absence of a lectern or pulpit and brings a written prayer which he must read in full view of the assemblage. This immediately breaks the mood of prayer which it is the leader's business to promote. Prayers are offered at an outdoor vesper service which are more appropriate at the opening of Congress. At political rallies one hears petitions which are at home in the churchly intimacy of a Bible study group. To avoid such mistakes the leader of worship should visualize in advance the setting, occasion, and purpose of his prayer, particularly in those cases where a more personal and pastoral knowledge is denied him.

Not only should the minister be sensitively flexible to the human environment and visualize in advance the physical environment of his prayer; he should

make full use in his preparation of the changes and climaxes of the passing year.

Within his own church, at least, following the Christian calendar gives his prayers continuity and accumulative effect. The prayers in the last chapter of this book are arranged to suggest the possibilities of this approach as a cycle for the Christian year.

Let no one bemoan the fact that Christian prayer is to a great extent occasional, for this provides us with genuine opportunities. The occasional prayer is neither an exposition nor an encomium. It should not explain the nature of the occasion on which it is offered nor pay wordy tribute to it. Though it takes its rise quite naturally in the occasion, the prayer may and should lead the worshipers beyond it. If merely occasional, the prayer loses sight of the occasion's significance. On Easter and Christmas Sunday the prayer starts rightly and naturally from the nature of the observance itself. But why should not a Christmas prayer emphasize the theme of world brotherhood or an Easter prayer expand its customary otherworldly stress on immortality to include a plea for moral strenuousness here and now? It is helpful to remember in this connection Dean W. R. Inge's definition of heaven: "Heaven is not a far-off place to which we hope to go; it is the presence of God in which we ought to live."¹

The services leading to or from the climactic

¹ From *Personal Religion and the Life of Devotion*, by W. R. Inge. Quoted by permission of the publishers, Longmans, Green and Co., Inc.

Christian days also yield telling opportunities for pastoral prayer. Many a minister, discouraged by the familiar emptiness of the pews, has called the Sunday after Easter "let-down Sunday." But let him that day recapture in his prayer the Easter mood and weave it into the continuing parish life. Advent, too, is rich in thought and image for our prayers, for it possesses abundant associations that lift up the search after fellowship and worship of the Highest, culminating in the final mystery of the divine entrance into humble human life.

The majority of our pastoral prayers are not occasional in this sense. Yet there is steady and valid motivation for them in such secular occasions as New Year's, Labor Day, or Memorial Day, which lend themselves naturally to religious treatment. The minister will be more on his guard at times like Mother's Day and the Fourth of July. If he can give them prayerful recognition without losing his Christian balance or the dignity of his office, he may do so. If not, they are better omitted as incentives for his cycle of pastoral prayer.

He must also use with caution the days set aside for various purposes by a multitude of churchly and secular groups. Though he is wary of regimenting his fellow-worshipers under the banner of this slogan or that proposal, the minister may respond wisely to the true incentives for prayer which come now and then by the route of these designated days.

Then there are frequent motivations for prayer in recent happenings of interest to the parish. The suc-

cessful completion of a community project, a hotly contested labor dispute, or a denominational convention may afford human substance and imaginative possibility to one's prayers. It should be borne in mind that such happenings cannot merely be mentioned or included but should be re-thought and re-shaped into the appropriate speech of prayer.

The coming and passing of the seasons furnish yet another stimulus in preparing our prayers. Some of the prayers which are remembered longest speak of the warm winds and rains of spring, the frosty cleanliness of winter, or the exhilarating tang of autumn. Being clothed themselves in the rich colors of nature's changing garment, such prayers lead us to the Spirit that animates "the choir of heaven and furniture of earth."

The weekly sermon itself provides a constant incentive for the pastoral prayer. This should be carefully distinguished from the habit which has become prevalent of making the prayer a means to a homiletical end. The prayer may find its legitimate purpose either by way of preparation for the message to come or by way of recapitulating the theme of a previous sermon. It thus offers a most effective channel of continuity for one's pastoral ministry.

This book is written in time of war. It becomes appropriate, therefore, and even imperative, to ask how the pastoral prayer may respond to the heightened sensibilities and deepened urgency of our people at such a time. Prayer in wartime is both easier and more difficult to offer than prayer in time of peace.

The issues of war are momentous, terribly real, tragically compelling. The folk who come into our churches bring with them the shock, the disillusionment, the insecurity, or the failure of nerve with which war has burdened their living. Prayer is easier because our people are more ready to pray.

Yet prayer in wartime is also more difficult. The insistent, demanding claims of war unconsciously tend to force Christian worship into a tighter mold. Prayer becomes too often a confirmation of the attitudes we bring to church, not a challenge to them. It is far too easy to forget in war the things that belong unto our peace. Thus prayer in the genuine Christian sense becomes arduous and formidable.

Three perils lurk in the path of the prayer-maker in wartime. A keen sense of the Christian's predicament, as God and Caesar struggle for mastery over his allegiance, may lead to the habit of crisis prayer. Such prayer is heavy with the groans of confession, but hungers to be fed with promise. The prevailing word of patriotic enthusiasm may cause one to identify the cause of the nation with the cause of God, and thus makes prayer an agency of morale. Morale prayer carries the longing for military victory to God, assuming that He is the nation's ally and that He blesses the "righteous might" exerted against the enemy. It is a sorry caricature of Christian prayer. Still another peril is that prayer becomes a compensatory experience, a haven of refuge from the storm. However sound in its insight that peace on earth and good will among men are goals of eternal value,

compensatory prayer commits the error of cutting asunder the togetherness of final goal and present fact which stirs and livens Christian action.

There is, however, a way of prayer for those who live in time of war which avoids these perils and speaks a three-fold word for Christian people. These are judgment, relief, and promise. By its very act prayer is a judgment on the ways of men. War is a stain upon the goodness of God which prayer affirms. The hellishness of war must not make us disobedient unto the heavenly vision; we must speak the word of judgment in our prayers.

The situation created by the incessant pressure of war upon our every waking moment calls for "the sure relief of prayer." We should afford grieving, anxious, or restless folk the relaxation, refreshment, and comfort they need. When people come to church they need to forget the pressure of war in order to meet it again with renewed strength. What better rest from war's grip can there be than Christian prayer?

The greatest gift of prayer to those who live in the shadow of war should be that of promise. Prayer looks through the night of war to see the first faint streaks of sunlight in the morning sky. It is the preparation, in the midst of war, of the good news of peace. Martin Luther wrote: "Prayer is a strong wall and fortress of the church; it is a goodly Christian's weapon." Because prayer promises us the Kingdom of God it is a strong wall and fortress against which the winds of fear and terror and desperation wear themselves out. It is the high office of

those who wield the goodly weapon of prayer in time of war to speak this judgment, to afford this relief, and to offer this dawning promise.

When all these suggestions arising from the yearly cycle and the occasional context have been fully utilized, the minister still faces the practical task of getting his prayer into final form. Several guide-posts may be followed here.

A notebook of phrases and ideas which have possibilities for prayer will prove a real help. The prayer-maker, like many an effective speaker, benefits from an orderly and convenient filing of materials. A topical arrangement, provided it is one's own, renders them accessible and makes the routine of preparation shorter and easier.

A further suggestion is that the prayer's form should follow its purpose. If it contains poetic words or phrases of antithesis, setting off the dynamic contrast between God and man, it is far more effective than if it merely states or expounds that contrast. No one prayer can possibly do justice to this greatest of contrasts, but it may suggest it by a series of lesser contrasts. Prayer-making is not piecing together a picture-puzzle of materials; it is more like feeling one's way along a darkened trail to a lighted destination.

The prayers following this chapter illustrate how this suggestion may be carried out. Whether one has in mind God as the Giver of all good things or beauty as divine achievement and human possibility, his prayer's form should be shaped according to the

chosen theme of contrast. Its images, phrases, and ideas then march with the guiding purpose of the prayer; they are the means by which the spirit's movement toward God is aroused and directed.

Another suggestion regarding preparation is that one's prayer should be self-revealing. The beginner at prayer-making is apt to be self-conscious about his style. If he takes his prayer as seriously as the sermon, he is bound to be ill at ease and perhaps even awkward at first. What in one sense is the necessary evil in all art or science is the condition of sincere public prayer. Yet if one perseveres at the task of prayer-making the self-consciousness disappears. Here, as elsewhere, "practice makes perfect." The risks attending the discovery and use of one's own style are fewer than those taken in employing a second-hand, stilted utterance in prayer.

A prayer, inevitably, is flavored by what its maker has lived through, the places he has been, the persons he has known. A mere passing acquaintance with the prayers included in this book reveals that some were written near the sea and others in the shadow of mountains, that many were written with students and faculties in mind and that their writer has read much in philosophy and poetry. How can we read Stevenson's prayers written at Vailima without sensing his recurring attacks of pain, his longing for release from pain as well as his determination to overcome its weakening effects? Since prayer in spirit and in truth cannot help but reveal the self of its maker, let him glory in the fact. Let him be himself in his prayer as

well as priest and pastor of his people, measuring his effort by the questions: Is it true? Is it I?

A fourth suggestion is that the prayer be read aloud after the final form has been prepared. This enables the leader of worship to correct any defects of style he may find. Also it gives him good practice in the prayer's delivery.

Finally, it is important to gauge the time required for the prayer's delivery. The average pastoral prayer is much too long. Careful preparation along the lines suggested here keeps it compact, concise and clear. Three minutes is a good average length for a prayer. A one-minute prayer seldom can create the proper attitude or develop a theme adequately. A five-minute prayer is as long as some congregations can stand, and longer than most care to sit through.

We have assumed that the prayer is written in the form in which it is to be delivered. But this is not always necessary. An outline of the prayer, indicating the theme and its development, with the phrases the leader wants especially to remember, may be enough. For those who do not read aloud with ease and grace this is probably the best method.

Yet the discipline of writing out one's prayer is most valuable. It demands the painstaking patience of all creative expression. It gives one an objective model for measuring his future efforts. Furthermore, it enables the minister to weave his prayers into a continuing pattern of Christian experience throughout the year. It is also good to have some material result of one's preparation.

The minister has now reached the crucial moment of delivering his prayer. He stands in the presence of his people as the mediator of their needs and hopes before that other Presence. If he has been primarily the pastor during the preparation of his prayer, he now becomes chiefly the priest. His pastoral office has not been lost but incorporated into his priestly task. As pastor, his responsibility is to his people. He must gather them with himself into the mood of adoration, then guide them skilfully through the other moods of his prayer. But most of all at that moment he is a priest, one whose final devotion and first responsibility is to God. No matter how much he may be concerned to move the worshipers by the spirit of prayer, his chief task is the invocation of the Presence in whose sight they and he are met. This solemn two-fold obligation shapes his every word and act.

He speaks the words of prayer with authority. He does so not apologetically or hesitantly but as one poised and assured. He does not ask cautiously, "Shall we pray?" He declares firmly and warmly, "Let us pray." Knowing that he and his people are bound on an awesome voyage of the spirit, his speech and manner suggest its high importance and prepare them for taking part in it.

His praying is easily audible. If he is to make the words of prayer the people's own, he avoids both the semi-whisper sometimes mistaken for reverence and the declaiming voice which suggests that the worshipers and not God are addressed.

His tone of voice is well-modulated, resonant, and unforced. As one who speaks with authority, he avoids both an elocutionary preciseness and a conversational informality. His words come evenly and clearly, without strain, harshness, or dryness.

The best speech of public prayer is not a monotone but a kind of heightened conversation, lacking both the hortatory tone of the sermon and the ritualistic tone of the readings. It must be intimate, yet indirect in its effect on the worshipers. Prayer is as if we were speaking our innermost thoughts in public; we are giving voice to things we do not share with our dearest friends. Its speech calls for genuine skill in the use of the voice.

The ideal prayer is spoken in an unhurried tempo, responding to the changes of theme and mood from adoration to final "Amen." The minister in his priestly office bends his voice to the prayer's natural cadences and rhythms, pausing when a pause is worshipfully effective. Normally a prayer begins slowly, according to the stately mood of the invocation. It gathers momentum as the words become more abrupt with moral emphasis or lengthens out as more exalted thoughts and leisurely rhythms demand. The spoken prayer makes use of varied shades of color and movement within the power of the human voice.

If the minister reads his prayer, as he often may, his eyes are ahead of his voice, seeing not single words but whole phrases and sentences. Keeping the written prayer out of the people's sight, he avoids giving the impression of reading, making the written

words the vehicle of his expressiveness, not an obstacle to it.

The physical bearing of the one who leads in prayer is likewise authoritative. Throughout his delivery he maintains the posture of prayer, with head bowed, though speaking confidently and clearly. His presence is erect though not stiff. He does not shift his people's attention from the prayer to himself by moving his body or turning his head. As he begins to pray he assumes and retains a poise that is unobtrusive but challenges respect.

A second quality of his priestly office is dignity. The minister's quiet dignity as he speaks the words of prayer is eloquent of the worthful Presence that is God.

The priestly leader knows that he is an instrument, however unworthy, of the soul's ascent. He does not cloud the purity of the moment by any mannerisms or peculiarities of gesture and diction. These are effaced in the realization that he is then, more plainly than at other times, the humble servant of the Most High.

He therefore shuns all cheap and thoughtless flattery of God, all hint of empty, patronizing compliment to Him. Knowing in whom he has believed and being persuaded of His goodness and power, he approaches God with neither a nervous inquisitiveness nor an over-confident familiarity. He is too aware of the vast distances the human soul must cross in order to approach God in spirit and in truth to permit himself any such caricature of prayer. He who makes a prayer knows that he is "on this side glory";

he knows, too, how far apart are the thoughts of God and men.

The one who prays makes bold to come into that far Presence and lift others into its light. His every act is moved forward by a sure sense of the kingdom, power, and glory lying about the common ways of men. As shepherd of the spirits entrusted to his care, he brings with him the wonder and the heartache, the splendor and the shame that make up life. As priestly leader, one utterly convinced of God, he looks in faith and hope toward the One who is with us even though we see Him not and has power to strengthen us beyond our deserving for the issues of life.

The Presence in whose light the priestly office has its dignity and authority is real to those for whom we lift our prayers only if it is real to us who speak them. As one who himself stands in the need of prayer, the leader knows the needs of others. As one who has committed himself in fellowship and worship to God, he possesses the confidence of an explorer into a far country. As one who has dwelt long with beauty, responding to and perhaps even creating things of gallant loveliness, he moves men and women by skilled and sensitive speech into alignment with the Greatest and Best.

Such a maker of prayer recovers for his people a lost radiance. His heart in devoted pilgrimage, he brings to bear upon his people's living the pressure of a way, a truth, and a life which in perilous times is our surest heritage and greatest hope.

O Almighty God, from whom every good prayer cometh, and who pourest out upon all who desire it the spirit of grace and supplication, deliver us when we draw nigh to Thee from coldness of heart and wanderings of mind, that with steadfast thoughts and kindled affections we may worship Thee in spirit and in truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

CHAPTER NINE

A Cycle of Illustrative Prayers

THERE comes a time in the experience of reading a book like this when the reader, surfeited with principles, clamors for practicality. "Now this is all very fine," he may say. "It would be nice if our prayers were like that, but what shall I do about it? How can I bring my own efforts into line with these blue prints of perfection?"

We said in the first chapter that the aim of this book is to effect a union of theory and practice at the focal point of the actual experience of public worship. This last chapter seeks to exhibit the practical results of taking seriously the principles of self-discovery, self-commitment, and dynamic contrast in prayer. It is the author's way of saying to the reader: "This is what I mean."

The order that places theory before practice is of course a reversal of the way things happen in real life. Praying comes first, thinking about it later. Yet surely these prayers will be read with clearer understanding because they are preceded by the discussion of theory and technique in which we have engaged. The order of knowing, the scholastic philosophers used to say, is not the order of living. True; but we endeavor to

know more in order to live better, and by the same token a knowledge of what goes into the making of good public prayer precedes carrying out its requirements.

These prayers are all the author's own. Chosen with the parish minister in mind, they are intended to exhibit the principles we have considered. They also illustrate, it is hoped, the benefits of considering prayer as a kind of poetry, as well as those conferred by constant reading in Biblical, liturgical, devotional and "secular" sources.

A further hope is that the arrangement of these prayers in a cycle for the Christian year may open up possibilities of continuity in the making and hearing of public prayer. Our prayers, not less than our sermons, should provide a cumulative, enlarging Christian experience.

The pastoral prayers included here are crystallizations of one prayer-maker's responses to the varied demands upon his office. It is his wish that they should serve the reader, not as ideal patterns, but as working illustrations for the very practical tasks of public prayer.

ADVENT

As with gladness men of old, guided by a star,
came seeking the place where Jesus lay, so may we,
O God, be led by the star of loyalty to Thee. Let no
cloud of bitterness or grief shut from our eyes its
radiant gleam. May the dark mantle of surrounding

night only enhance the vivid splendor of our shining hope. Grant us in the Christmas season a measure of the Christlike spirit, that we may be eager for the message of Thy goodness and ready for the deeds of love and mercy that minister like angels to our needy generation. As we hear and sing an old story, reveal to us its fresh and lively import for ourselves. May we, too, offer gifts in the world's humble places, that Christ may be born again in us, and that Thy star may brighten all men's roads to Thee. In his name we pray. Amen.

CHRISTMAS

Thou whose glory is in the highest and the lowliest, we thank Thee in the midst of keeping Christmas for all children and for the childlike heart. We praise Thee for eager trust and happy laughter, for the wonder and magic of surprise, and for Thy circling love's enthrallment. Take from our hearts all barriers of weariness or spite. Restore in us the joyful radiance of little children, that nothing in these precious hours may sever us from Thee. We thank Thee for the gracious gift of giving, by which we are helpers of another's joy.

Now when homes are gay with wreaths, and light and merry carols sound throughout the streets, attune us to Thy heavenly music and celestial light. Bestow upon our spirits the true joy that finds its good in giving good away. These we ask in fond allegiance to him who is the joy of heaven to earth come down,

whose presence Thou hast promised to the loving, wondering heart, even the Christ child. Amen.

THE NEW YEAR

Our God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come, we praise Thee that even in memory of failure lies the hope of worthier achievement. As the warming breath of spring softens the grip of ice and snow, release our hard-pressed spirits from the clutch of habit and the chains of custom. O Thou in whom is newness of life, lift us above the dreary plain of past mistakes; save us from drifting to and fro as clouds wander over the mountain's face; strengthen us for the shocks and changes of the coming year. Grant us true courage, Lord, that we may walk through light and shadow unafraid, assured that what is excellent endures. Keep us true to the vision lighting our better moments, that each passing day may find us wiser and more perfect in Thy sight. So may we, who know not what a day or a year may bring forth, look steadfastly and with hope unto him who is the author and finisher of our faith, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

A FAIRER COUNTRY

Almighty God, who hast given us this good land for our heritage, we pray that we may be ever true to our country and to Thee. Grant to our nation a humble reverence, a true democracy, a broad vision. Save us from hatred, narrowness, and unlovely pride.

When heart-aches come and hardships force us to despair, guard us, we pray, from all assaults of weakness or of fear. Preserve our spirits in the midst of strife. Let no circumstance embitter or confuse us. May we, in plenty or in want, in peace or war, cling surely to the vision of Thy kingdom, a brotherhood of all men rooted in Thy justice and Thy care. Draw close about us the bonds that keep us true to one another and to Thee. Endue with wisdom and loving kindness those who lead us in our time of peril. Grant, to us who follow, a hearty devotion, not alone to this our land, but to that fairer country which Thou hast promised to us and to all men besides. We pray Thee in the name of Jesus, who brought to earth its glad and wondrous tidings. Amen.

A PRAYER FOR EVENING

God of the evening, who bringest home all that bright morning scatters, we come to Thee as wanderers groping in the gathering darkness for a light to lead us. The poignant sense of our guilt is upon us as we remember those who suffer and are afraid while we sit comfortably together. For each opportunity to give of our substance to them, that their joy may be made full, we give Thee thanks. For all promptings to generous and devoted living Thou dost bring to us, we give Thee thanks. Be Thou to us the cloud of courage by day, the fire of sympathy by night.

O God, we pray Thee for Thy church. In Thy time mend her broken witness to Thee and give her one

clear voice to all the world. Grant even to us who pursue small duties in a common place the glory of eternal partnership with Thee.

We pray Thee for our work. May it be such as we are happy in, but if not, help us to seek in other paths rewards and comradeships that keep life wholesome and, it may be, a delight.

We pray Thee for our friends. Whether they live near at hand or beyond mountains, plains, or oceans, in lands afar, may our thought of them be as a prayer offered for their welfare and their peace. May all that binds us to our common life and Thee be lights in the growing darkness, sparks from the Light of the world that never shall go out, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

MESSENGERS OF GOOD

O Lord our God, Thou art all our good! We, Thine unprofitable servants, remember with humility and shame the promises forgotten, the love not offered and the good undone. Forgive our faltering purposes; amend our love of the far distant with a vision of men's nearer needs. Knowing how abundantly, without deserving, we have gained our good from Thee, we would share Thy love with others. We speak our words of thanks to Thee for golden waves of grain and friendly, arching skies, for light of sun and moon and for the benediction of the rain. May we show forth Thy praise not only with our mouths but in our lives, by doing justly, loving mercy

and walking evermore in quiet fellowship with Thee. Make us Thy messengers of good, that we may be in very truth Thy children, building in quiet deeds the noble edifice of Thy kingdom, and looking ever unto Thee whose goodness is our own. We pray Thee in the spirit of him whose name we bear. Amen.

“INASMUCH”

Lord of the lost sheep and the wandering child, Thou shepherd of all troubled souls, save us from callousness to others' needs—the homeless, hungry, lonely folk who crave our love and care. Remind us, closed within secure and selfish walls, of fellow-men whose very life is at best monotony, at worst a horror. Make real to us their grief, their silent pain. Reveal to mind and heart the plight of those who march and know not why, those who wait at home in anxious expectation, those whose empty faces haunt the city streets. Train our steps to lowly paths of service; grant that for love of them we may leave all we have of false security and follow Thee. Nourish in us the confidence by which we can live valiantly, as fitting knights who wear Thine armor, that from the smoking ashes and broken bodies of this world may rise a juster and fairer place, where men shall call each other brother and each shall find his good within the good of all. Grant us still more, we pray, the competence to bring that happier time to birth, in lives of gentle courage and of warm concern. Amen.

GOOD FRIDAY

O Thou who hast revealed Thy love for us in the broken figure of Thy son upon a cross, we thank Thee that even the path of suffering leads to Thee. We brood, with the long memory of Thy church, upon those hours of agony as if we had been there ourselves—that sacred head bowed down with grief and shame, that spirit tender, forgiving, trusting to the last. In this place and time of deathly pain Thy spirit flashed its greatest message to the heart of man, and then was born that Way of love even unto suffering death which is the truth and life for us forever. Kindle not alone our feeling, as we ponder that day we strangely name as good. Hearten our wills to do Thy will, in remembrance of him whose name and sign we bear, even Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

EASTER

Almighty God, who hast brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, we thank Thee for the living Christ. Shadowed by dark clouds of time and earthly life, may we yet turn to him for light. As we come wondering to the place where Jesus lay, we thank Thee that the radiance of his life broke the restraint of death and has become eternal.

We thank Thee too for the assurance that each human life carries a Beyond within it. As we think lovingly of those dear ones no longer with us, engulf

our sorrow in abiding hope. Sharpen our vision for the things not seen, that our tears may vanish in the ocean of Thy love.

Grant us power to rise with him who is lord of life and death to mountain heights of service and devotion, that while yet on the earth we may glimpse the nobler vistas and breathe the purer air of eternity. May our walk with Thee be humble, yet strewn with the gentle grace of flowers. Help us to enthrone him who is the shepherd of the sheep in this our inner world of fear and pain and in this our outer world of hate and unconcern. So may we live deservedly of immortality, our Father, becoming children of the resurrection, and may Thy kingdom come through him to whom we lift our joyous praises on this happy day. Amen.

A SAFE MOORING

Eternal One, who art the anchor of our purest thoughts, hold us firmly in the glory of Thy presence. From the dreary intercourse of daily life we turn to Thy surprising, gladdening goodness. From the world's fever we raise our eyes to calmer regions of eternal things. Behold us, weak with fear and sick with hopelessness, and send Thy strength upon us. See us, lonely as we are, and grant us the sure sense of comradeship with Thee, O our divine Companion. Sustain those baffled by youthful inexperience with steadfast hope in better things, and guard those worn with care from all intrusions of a bitter weariness.

ness. To those who sorrow or fail in health put forth Thy gracious comforting. In all we do or say or even think, anchor our lives with chains of love to the safe mooring of Thy presence, that we may rest securely in Thy buoyant, boundless care. In Jesus' name. Amen.

THINGS NOT SEEN

O Lord, our Light, who art the source divine and life of all, help us in the stillness to know that Thou art God. Sights dazzle us and we fail to see Thy light. Tempting sounds deafen us to Thy still, small voice. In a dark wood it is hard to see the path that leads unto our peace. As the flower turns to the sun, bend us toward Thy light, which never was on sea or land; and as the shore receives the ocean, lay wide our spirits to Thine incoming tide of love. May we, who live constantly hemmed in by what is visible and temporal, grow in awareness of the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. So shall we live more wisely in the light of that which faith gives us eyes to see, for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

FOR A PASTOR-ELECT

Eternal Spirit, brooding o'er the hearts of men, in this lighted place set in the midst of darkness, we raise with one accord our hearts to Thee. Grant that

in heart and will we shall belong to that brighter Light of which we are but dim reflections. So may Thy church indeed lighten the world's darkness, calling Thy children in from the alarms and terrors of our mortal journey and sending us forth again in the vigor and confidence of Christ.

Though towering mountains and vast oceans shut us from our world and Thine, may they not confine our sympathy. Help us to feel the pulse-beat of our common need and constant hope, that in our time the body of Thy people may be sound and whole again.

Grant unto him whose leadership in the church we mark and honor the broader vision, the deeper loyalty, required of all who serve Thee in this hour of the world's need. Strengthen him against disappointment and despair. Give to him a sure dissatisfaction with the things that are, that the things which are to be may come through him. To those whose minister he is, give, we pray, unswerving constancy and faithful trust. So may he and we walk in Thy ways made known or to be made known unto us, looking ever unto him who is the source and goal of living, even Jesus Christ. Amen.

ON EARTH AS IN HEAVEN

O Thou in whose life we find our life and in whose will is our peace, grant us now the sense of Thy nearness, of Thy law's majesty and Thy love's consolation. Forgive us that we have shut our spirits' doors to Thee, and that our wills through waywardness

have barred Thee out. We pray that our very faults may be the means of fuller harmony with Thee. We ask that from our true repentance may come Thy forgiveness and amendment of our living.

For those in sorrow we ask a portion of Thy comfort; for anxious hearts we seek Thy patience; for those too confident of their own goodness, Thy rebuke. To each of us give what he most needs, though we know not what it is, and though our poor words stumble in the asking.

We thank Thee that Thou hast set us in a common world. Enrich our solitary lives with the assurance that we are all members one of another. Bless to us all opportunities for being together, in body and in spirit. Strengthen both in us and among us the will to love each other even as Thou hast loved us. And send us forth, we pray, refreshed and heartened for the tasks of brotherhood, to do Thy will on earth as it is done in heaven, for his sake in whose name we lift our prayer, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

FOR A BACCALAUREATE SERVICE

O Thou who teachest all men in the school of life, without whose guidance effort is useless, without whose light search is vain, we thank Thee for the larger life in which our life is cast, and for the sources of our being in the faith and work of those who died that we might live. We thank Thee too for the vast mysteries which beat in on our little certainties as the ocean comes in upon the shore. Save us, we pray,

from the narrow satisfactions of being merely modern, from the tyranny of fashion and the illusions of our knowledge. Enrich our sympathy with all who share our common lot. Enlarge our understanding of the universe in which we are so small, yet so important. Make us worthy of our great heritage, formed from the very life of the founders of this, our college. And, since only the adventurous may know the greatness of the past, grant us the power to face our future in their faith, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

YET MORE CLOSELY ✓

O Love that wilt not let us go, we pray Thee in this time of adoration for Thy love within us and among us. We know, and we confess with shame, the stubbornness which breaks apart the ties that bind us one to another and all to Thee. In thought and word and deed we build our fences of misunderstanding and seek to flee Thy claims upon us. Surrounded by haunting possibilities of good, we choose repeatedly the easier way. As morning mists rise to unveil majestic mountains, take from our lives the clouds that hide Thy face. As wanderers leave the underbrush to glimpse a grander vista, raise us above the ordinary to altitudes of the sublime.

Gratefully we call to mind the goodly fellowship in which by trust and memory we stand. For those who are the heroes of our faith, and for the humbler folk whose steps have made the path wherein we

walk, we thank Thee. Faced with so great a cloud of witnesses and so compelling a kingdom of the spirit, bind us together yet more closely in that love wherewith Thou hast loved us, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

SURROUNDED WITH LOVELINESS

Thou who touchest earth with beauty, we pray Thee for power to create and to enjoy. We praise Thee that Thou hast surrounded us with loveliness in the azure sky, in the horizons edging our visible world, and in the faces of our fellow-men. We thank Thee that we may respond to the traces of beauty in Thy world and express to others the happiness we feel.

May no stain of ugliness mar the beauty which is in rightness of conduct toward one another; may no impurity of motive blind us to the harmony of sensitive and ordered living. We pray for all who fashion in color, stone, or sound the brilliant glory of a fairer world than this, and for ourselves we ask a fuller share in the heritage and promise of creative imagination, in the name of Jesus, who found beauty in every living thing and left it lovelier than he found it. Amen.

FOR THE OPENING OF COLLEGE

O God of truth, who art ever greater than our highest thoughts of Thee, enable us in reverence to accept all truth made known or to be made known

unto us. Teach us patiently to search out what is true and honestly to express it. Remind us of the brevity of a single lifetime, set against the long enterprise of human knowledge; yet kindle in us a ready eagerness to reap for ourselves its abundant fruits. We commit ourselves unreservedly to the ways of truth. May we discover, declare and defend it with no fear of letting old and lesser truths go when new and greater truths arise. Give us assurance that we live in the presence of far clearer wisdom than our own.

Thou, God of truth, art also God of love. So reinforce our learning with love, we pray, that its glow may warm as well as brighten, and that its structures of thought may be girded with honesty of purpose and balance of feeling. Let Thy truth come alive in us and through us to our world. Amen.

NOT WITHOUT HOPE

Thou to whom men continually turn when all other helpers fail, let us not live as spirits without hope. Forgive us that what we sense so dimly in our hearts has been too long in coming into our lives, and that Thy ways are not our ways, O God. We would find words of gratitude to say to Thee for the deathless dream of human brotherhood which troubles the long sleep of fear and hate in which men linger still. For the longing that no circumstance can crush, no defeat can master, that all Thy people may some day be one in spirit even as they are now one in truth, we praise Thee. Stir us and nerve us to stronger

endeavors, which shall clothe our dreams with substance and power, that our hopes may not perish from the earth but ever guide the ways of men and nations surely, silently, to Thee. Amen.

THANKSGIVING

O Source of thankfulness in every heart, we bring to Thee our grateful adoration for Thyself. What more than Thee can we desire? Thy presence maketh all things most delightful, and without Thee there is no enduring joy. Thou sendest the bright morning for strenuous work of body and mind, and somber evening for our peaceful rest. To youth Thou givest comradeship and laughter, to snow-crowned age the ripening confidence of wisdom. Where but in Thee is our true comfort and brave hope? Yea, though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death and pain, Thou leadest us into an open country of relief, and settest our feet on a high rock of purpose and affection. Thou art our refuge and our might. Who but Thee confronts us with the lure and potency of better things? For the undying hope of brotherhood, the vision of a reign of righteousness, the tireless growth of knowledge, and Thy coming kingdom, and for the will in us to make them real among us, we give Thee thanks, heartfelt and overflowing, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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